THE CORRESPONDENCE OF THEODOSIUS AND CONSTANTIA.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

CONTAINING

THEIR CORRESPONDENCE AFTER SHE HAD TAKEN THE VEIL.

LETTER I.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

THE efforts which a mind in trouble makes to regain it's loſt peace, like thoſe glances of the ſun that ſtruggle through oppoſing clouds, are delightful to all beholders. When my Conſtantia roſe above that gloom of ſorrow, which her too apprehenſive heart had thrown around her; when I ſaw her eye brighten, and her elegant but dejected features aſſume the beautiful form in which Nature had moulded them; I ſhould have felt the pleaſure of a chriſtian, had I not once been Theodoſius.

Amiable mourner! let us now forget the name which you have ſo long remembered with anguiſh, and which you could not pronounce without trembling, when you affectingly told Theodoſius that you believed him to be no more. I wept, my Conſtantia: but my concern aroſe not from a ſenſe of your guilt, but of your ſufferings. Thoſe tears, indeed, fell from the eyes of Theodoſius, and in them the confeſſor had no part. The powers of memory and reflection were, in one moment, preſented with every ſcene of diſtreſs and tenderneſs which our unhappy loves had produced. And when I conſidered myſelf as the unfortunate cauſe of your long, your unmerited ſufferings, I felt, in one painful minute, what Conſtantia had endured for years. Perhaps, too, your unequalled fidelity and unaltered love, while they flattered my heart, brought it back a moment to the world. But my guardian ſpirit whiſpered me that I had made a higher choice, and reminded me that the duties I owed you were thoſe of a ſpiritual director, from whom you were to receive conſolation and inſtruction. But, before I proceed to the farther diſcharge of thoſe duties, let me intreat you to forgive—forgive me, ſuffering innocence, for being the unhappy, though involuntary inſtrument of your many miſeries!—Five unchearful years, my Conſtantia! how has your gentle heart ſupported itſelf during that melancholy period? How has it ſuſtained thoſe cruel apprehenſions which, in confeſſion, ſhook your frame? The reflection of what you muſt have endured for me, as it then wrung my ſoul with anguiſh, yet clouds it with ſorrow, and has power to diſturb the ſerenity of a mind, which I truſt hath been viſited by the peace of God.

But

But I ſhould be ſtill more diſconſolate, were I not well aſſured that your preſent happineſs will be in proportion to your former ſufferings, and that the difficult ways through which you walked have at laſt conveyed you to the manſions of peace.

Such, Conſtantia, is the lot of human life. The road to happineſs is ſeldom ſtrewed with flowers: nor, perhaps, ought it to be ſo; as we ſhould, in that caſe, be inclined to take our *paſſage* for our *port*, and while we enjoyed the manna, we might neglect the promiſed land.

I am, however, of a different opinion from moſt men, with regard to moral and natural evils. They derive them from the hand of Providence, and charge the conſequences of human paſſions, follies, and vices, upon the Divine adminiſtration. Would this be proper for a perſon who was labouring under diſeaſes that are the natural and inevitable effects of intemperance? Can thoſe pains which the ſufferer has conſciouſly and voluntarily brought upon himſelf, be deemed the viſitation of God? Would not this be *to charge God fooliſhly?* And if this were admitted, with what propriety could we ſay of that Divine Being, that *he does not willingly afflict his creatures?* With regard to this doctrine, my Conſtantia, it is of conſequence that you ſhould be rightly informed, becauſe *from miſtaken apprehenſions of Providence proceed almoſt all the errors of religious faith.* But moſt dangerous to ourſelves, and moſt injurious to the Deity, are thoſe opinions which magnify his deſpotiſm at the expence of his benevolence. Hearken not to ſuch opinions, Conſtantia: God cannot be the miniſter of evil.

Our ſufferings, natural and moral, are the conſequence of that freedom of will, which is the very eſſence of our moral powers, and without which we ſhould be mere machines, incapable of all virtue. There are, indeed, ſome natural evils, which to incur or avoid depends not on ourſelves, becauſe they come not within the œconomy of reaſon. But of theſe we partake only in common with mankind; and as in the diſpenſation of ſome of them we can perceive that Providence had wiſe and gracious purpoſes, ſo we may fairly infer that thoſe whoſe final cauſes we cannot apprehend, have their origin in the ſame univerſal-benevolence.

It is, I think, generally underſtood, as a doctrine founded upon revelation, that there are ſuch things as divine inflictions even in this life. No doubt there *may be* ſuch, and there *may be* ſeaſons obvious to the eye of Providence, when it is good for us to be afflicted. We *may be* ſummoned by calamity from the purſuit of pleaſure; and though we cannot perceive the hand, the writing *may be* divine.

But I believe that this interpoſition of the Supreme Power is very rare. Nay, I will own to my Conſtantia, that my faith in this doctrine is, at beſt, but diabolical; for while I *believe* I *tremble*. Will God do evil that good may come? Is it neceſſary? Can Almighty Power be limited to the uſe of means?

I will, moreover, warn you of the evils that may be derived from this doctrine. It may prompt us to vain compariſons and uncharitable conſtructions: when we behold the calamities of others, we may be inclined to trace the finger of God where it has not been; and when we tacitly refer to our own condition, we may impute our exemption from evil to that integrity whereof we ought not to boaſt.

Under the Moſaical diſpenſation, preſent inflictions were more viſible, becauſe more neceſſary: for what other reſtraint was there upon the moral actions of mankind? When the great ſanctions of Chriſtianity were ſet forth, thoſe reſtraints became inconſiderable, and were totally abſorbed in the intereſts of the new ſyſtem. *Old things paſſed away! Behold! all things became new.*

But *we are too apt to mix our religion, and to incorporate the divinity of the Old Teſtament with that of the New.* The moral law, indeed, ſtill remains in force, becauſe it's tendency was everlaſting; but when God ſaw fit to enter into a new covenant with man, the diſpenſations of his providence were altered, and made agreeable to it. Thus, though under the old law it might be neceſſary for the Divine Power *to chaſten whom he loved*, yet that meaſure could be no longer expedient, when the hopes and fears of mankind were appealed to by the ſanctions of immortality.

It is of great importance to you, Conſtantia,

Conſtantia, to form a right idea of your Creator, and to *know in whom you have believed.* To aſſiſt you in this reſpect, will be one of the firſt endeavours of Father

FRANCIS.

LETTER II.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

MY ſorrows for Theodoſius are no more; he lives, and Conſtantia is happy. If you would not have me remember my ſufferings, forget them yourſelf; for nothing now could make the reflection of them painful to me but their affecting my revered father.

Gracious Providence! and have I at length found a father? Has Heaven granted what Nature refuſed? She gave me, indeed, a father; but he forgot the name; or, he remembered the name and the authority, but forgot the duties of the alliance. Do I err? Then inſtruct me, my holy guide; inſtruct me to revere the man who baniſhed Theodoſius, and imbittered, without cauſe, the moments of her whom he had brought into being. But I will revere him, for he was kind at laſt, and permitted me to retire to this aſylum of peace. Whatever were his motives, I will revere him; for have I not here found the only comfort I was capable of? Am I not ſure that Theodoſius lives? Without that conviction (I own my weakneſs) I ſhould have been unhappy within theſe holy walls. The exerciſes of devotion I purſued with equal aſſiduity before I entered upon the conventual life; but my prayers were the heavy ſacrifices of ſorrow and contrition. I was alike a ſtranger to the ſerenity of peace, and to the comfort of hope. It was not in the power of conſcious penitence to ſet my heart at eaſe, whenever the painful thought preſented itſelf, that my cowardly acquieſcence in the will of a father had been death to the moſt valuable and moſt amiable of men. Pitying Heaven has at length undeceived me, and at once reſtored to my eyes thoſe dear lamented fugitives, Theodoſius and Happineſs; both changed, indeed, but both improved by the change. The pleaſure I enjoyed in the company of the elegant and lively Theodoſius, was gay, ſprightly, and animated, like himſelf: with him it departed and returned; and my heart was alternately delighted and depreſſed. Very different is the ſatisfaction I now feel: it is ſerene and peaceful, like Father Francis. My mind is collected, and my ſpirits are repoſed. No longer agitated with the anxieties and impatience of hopes that terminate here; my eye is fixed on that diſtant, invariable object of happineſs, on which time or chance can have no influence.

Ye holy retreats! ye venerable ailes! do I owe this peace to you? No, not to you: for methinks I have ſeen in your regions the gloom of diſcontent. Is it not, my pious Father, from a quiet conſcience that I derive this repoſe? I ſhould not, indeed, have felt it before I entered this convent, but I ſhould not then have known that Theodoſius was ſtill in being.

Do not think, however, that I rejoice not in my ſituation. I do rejoice in it: but my joy ariſes, as I apprehend, from a diſburdened mind. The ſudden change from painful apprehenſion to the certainty of confirmed wiſhes, was attended with a tranſport, the effects of which I ſtill feel. But will not theſe effects laſt? Surely they will. O my friend! what tears of joy have I ſhed over that firſt welcome letter, which informed me that *Theodoſius was ſtill alive!*

But do I not forget that I am addreſſing myſelf to the venerable Francis? Pardon me! I had indeed forgot, till on re-peruſing that ever-dear letter, I beheld the holy name at the bottom. Yes, delightful letter! ſweet meſſenger of peace! Thou informeſt me that I muſt conſider Theodoſius ſtill as dead. Ha! dead, didſt thou ſay? Theodoſius is ſtill alive. Didſt not thou ſay that, too? Equivocating letter! be gone into my boſom; but preſume not *there* to ſay that Theodoſius is dead.

Heavens! what rambling is this? Whither has my unguided pen betrayed me! Once more forgive me, my revered father.

I thank you for the comfort, as well as for the information, which your laſt letter afforded me. You have placed the Eternal Providence in a light the moſt amiable and new, at leaſt to me. I had always, hitherto, looked upon that power as the inflicter of temporary evils, and conſidered both private and publick calamities as his judgments.

But

But you have now made me of a different opinion; and I entirely agree with you, that temporary rewards and puniſhments are ſuperſeded by the ſanctions of the Chriſtian religion. Nevertheleſs, I am ſtill of opinion, that God may occaſionally interpoſe, by the infliction of evil, to ſave a wretch who is thoughtleſsly or obſtinately haſting to deſtruction; but, with you, I apprehend that ſuch diſpenſations are very rare, and am, for the reaſons you mention, almoſt afraid to believe them.

One thought, however, occurs to me on this occaſion, which I ſhall take the liberty to mention, in conſequence of the invitation you have given me to expreſs my ſentiments without reſerve.

We are ſo entirely different in our powers and paſſions, and the circumſtances of ſin and temptation are ſo extremely various, that though the Almighty might in general leave it to the ſanctions of religion alone to influence the actions of men, yet poſſibly he might (ſo to term it) reſerve a diſcretionary power, to bring proper objects by afflictions to their duty.

But though the Creator of the univerſe can in no ſenſe be the author of evil, it cannot be doubted, I apprehend, that he may and frequently does bring good out of evil. Of this the ſtory of Joſeph is, in all it's circumſtances, a remarkable proof. I cannot ſuppoſe, neither would you have me believe, that God inſpired the brethren of Joſeph with envy, that they might ſell him into Egypt? yet, what glorious advantages did the Almighty Providence bring out of that event!

And has he not, (for he regards the humbleſt of his creatures) has he not for me turned the path of ſorrow towards the harbour of peace? I will believe it, leſt I ſhould prove ungrateful. Pray for me, and inſtruct me. Adieu!

CONSTANCE.

LETTER III.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

GOOD ſenſe, Conſtantia, makes better comments than learning; and I find that to propoſe my opinions to you will be of advantage to myſelf.

But do you not err, my amiable friend, and is there not ſome acrimony in your language, when you ſpeak of your natural father? It muſt not be. The duties of parents and children are indeed reciprocal: but the unnatural parent cannot acquit the child of it's duty, any more than the undutiful child can acquit the parent of his natural obligations. Both theſe, however, are to be underſtood as ſecondary to the great duties we owe ourſelves. A child ought no more to embrace miſery than vice, to oblige a parent; and a parent is under no obligation to forfeit his own happineſs for the gratification of a child. But, under all circumſtances, that reſpect which is due to a parent ſtill ſubſiſts; and when Conſtantia reflects on this, ſhe cannot withold that reſpect. Pity your father, Conſtantia; pray for your father. *If the god of this world hath blinded his eyes*, fervently pray for him in the words of Saint David: 'O God, 'lighten his eyes, that he ſleep not the 'ſleep of death!' He bears no uncommon marks of guilt or infamy: his foible is the love of money; a paſſion which of all others is the moſt difficult to guard againſt, becauſe it increaſes by imperceptible degrees; and when it has once got entire poſſeſſion of the heart, I believe there is no remedy for it. Many liberal men have become covetous, but I never knew one covetous man who became liberal: ſo eaſy is it, in every inſtance, to deviate from virtue to vice; and ſo hard, in that particular caſe, to riſe from vice to virtue. Let us then conſider your father rather as an object of compaſſion, and by no means forget to offer up our prayers for him. Who knows whether Heaven may not liſten to the voice of ſupplicating innocence, and be overcome by the intreaties of filial piety? Would it not throw a new glory around the brows of Conſtantia ſhould her father be reſtored to virtue by her prayers?

You are in the right, Conſtantia, to aſcribe your preſent happineſs to peace of conſcience; for that is the foundation of all moral and religious comfort. Without that, the hallowed walls of a cloiſter would be hung with horrors, and the gloomy retreats of a convent would adminiſter melancholy to the mind. It is that alone which gives ſerenity to our devotion, and enables us properly to communicate with God. It is that which the apoſtle of the Gentiles,

tiles, in his Second Letter to the converts of Corinth and other parts of Achaia, offered to their conſideration, to take off that concern and ſorrow which they muſt have felt for the perſecutions which he and the reſt of his fellow-labourers had undergone in their travels through Aſia. The confidence of the conſcious mind, he informs them, in every painful, every trying calamity, had ſtill ſupported them. 'Nay,' continues he, 'we can even rejoice in our diſtreſſes, 'and *our rejoicing is this, the teſtimony 'of our conſcience.*'

If we ſhould enquire into the deſign of Providence in thus furniſhing us with this ſilent inſpector, we ſhould find, that in this caſe, as well as in all others, our God has acted from the dictates of infinite goodneſs. Had we been without this ever-active cenſor, what would have been the conſequence? Too apt we are, even now, to ſlight the admonitions of it, and ſhould we not ſtill more eaſily have fallen a prey to temptation, had there been no internal monitor to inform us that 'this ſhould not be done?' Would not vice have found many more votaries, when no meeting remonſtrance checked it, and no painful reflection followed? It is evident, then, that conſcience was ſtationed in the human mind by the *Giver of all good gifts*; and that, for the aid of virtue, and for the ſupport of reaſon, *it came down from the Father of lights*. Is not this, Conſtantia, our guardian angel, who warns us againſt the moſt dangerous of all enemies, the enemies of our ſalvation? By this friendly ſpy we are informed of, and even foreſee, their attacks; and happy it is for us that we are thus aſſiſted. The inſinuations of Vice, after all, are too often ſucceſsful, and her arts prevail againſt the force of conviction. Nor, indeed, ſhould we conſider all the ſtratagems ſhe makes uſe of, would there be any room to wonder at her ſucceſs. Does ſhe not aſſume the characters of pleaſure, knowledge, virtue; nay, and of religion too: her great patron being conſcious that he ſhall be moſt ſucceſsful in his works of darkneſs, when he aſſumes the appearance of an angel of light? Does not the moſt profligate licentiouſneſs call itſelf Pleaſure? Does not mole-ſighted Infidelity claim the titles of Knowledge and Philoſophy? Has not Religion been aſſerted by blood-thirſty Zeal? And has not fanatick Hypocriſy likewiſe aſſumed her banner, and lifted up her voice in the ſtreets? O Conſcience, thou ſacred guardian of rational virtue and religious truth, let looſe thy vengeance upon theſe monſters; theſe peſts of ſociety, and emiſſaries of Vice!

Do not you perceive, my Conſtantia, in this diſpenſation of Providence, the perfection of wiſdom and goodneſs? There are a thouſand vices, a thouſand enormities, which have nothing to fear from any human tribunal, but are checked and reſtrained by this mental Judge.

That peace which you imputed to a diſburdened mind led me naturally into theſe ſentiments. 'Will that peace,' you aſk, 'continue?' Doubt not that it will. It is *that peace which the world cannot give*, and which, therefore, the world cannot take away. That happineſs which is derived from a pleaſing concurrence of earthly events, will vaniſh when Fortune reverts her wheel; the ſame chance which reared the brittle fabrick of felicity may demoliſh it in a moment; but the religious ſatisfaction, if rightly founded, cannot be overthrown.

I am well aſſured, Conſtantia, that you will find your happineſs increaſed by the repeated exerciſes of devotion. It is impoſſible that the intercourſe we have with Infinite Goodneſs ſhould not be attended with preſent advantages.

But ever let it be your care, my amiable friend, that your devotion be rational and ſerene. Let it not riſe upon the wings of paſſion, but be offered up with a ſubdued and diſpaſſionate decency. Let your mind be clear and compoſed when you addreſs yourſelf to your God, leſt by any means you ſhould ſpeak unadviſedly to the Father of Wiſdom.

Wonder not, if I tell you that all your paſſions ſhould not be abſorbed in Heaven. Rational devotion is not founded in the glowing ardours of human ſenſibility; the more it partakes of theſe, the more remote it will be from that ſpiritual and intellectual worſhip which is paid to the Father of Lights by ſuperior natures. The adoration of paſſion is blind and impulſive; that of reaſon is clear and intelligent. By this worſhip the Deity is rationally honoured; by that he is implicitly adored.

For theſe reaſons, Conſtantia, I would not recommend to you thoſe books of

flaming devotion, which, while they kindle the heart, confuſe the head, and turn ſober piety into wild enthuſiaſm. If the authors of ſuch books meant to ſerve religion, they were miſtaken; for true piety differs as much from ſuch enthuſiaſtick ravings, as the chearful temper of ſerene health from the delirious wildneſs of a fever. *God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.* Whatever is ſpiritual is diſpaſſionate. Such is God himſelf; and ſuch ought to be the worſhip we offer him.

Adieu, my Conſtantia! May God keep you in his protection, and enlighten you by his grace.

FRANCIS.

LETTER IV.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

THEODOSIUS is not dead. The polite Theodoſius ſtill lives in the venerable Francis. When I received your laſt letter, my hand trembled, and my heart ſhrunk. Every idle, every wild expreſſion, every effuſion of vain imagination and uncorrected paſſion, that had dropped from my pen when I wrote to you, roſe up and reproached me before your ſeal was broken. While I read the firſt period of your letter, I frequently took my eye from the paper, and endeavoured to recollect the contents of my own. With fear and apprehenſion I proceeded from line to line; but when I found that you had overlooked many of my foibles, and touched the reſt with ſo delicate, ſo indulgent a hand—O my paternal friend! what floods of tender ſorrow fell from the eyes of your Conſtantia! Surely, the kindneſs of thoſe whom we revere, and are conſcious of having offended, is more cruel than their ſeverity could be. The heart would oppoſe itſelf againſt ſevere treatment, and call in pride to it's aid; but againſt the force of kindneſs there is no ſhield.

In what an amiable light do you repreſent that Goodneſs which brought us into being! Conſcience was undoubtedly one of his gracious gifts. That moral inſpector, whoſe ſuggeſtions ſo lately gave me pain, is now the principal author of my happineſs; and I find that conſcience is not more ſevere as an enemy, than kind as a friend. Was it not this that ſupported the ſufferer of Uzz; and was he not animated by the ſuffrage of Conſcience, when he wiſhed that man might be permitted *to plead his cauſe with God.* If I am miſtaken, correct me; my guide, my father, and my friend!

CONSTANCE.

LETTER V.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

I Am pleaſed with your reference to the book of Job, as it gives me an opportunity to tell you with what delight I have always read that beautiful dramatick poem. The ingenious author of it had ſacrificed to truth and nature. His character of the pious ſufferer, however exalted, is not exaggerated by any unnatural ſtrokes. While he is not permitted to fall into impious exclamation againſt the decrees of Providence, he complains of his diſtreſs with the ſenſibility of a man to whom *wearieſome nights were appointed.* Hence the afflicted patriarch ſometimes alarms us with paſſionate wiſhes for death, and ſometimes awakens our compaſſion with affecting ſighs for his former happineſs.

In the paſſage you have referred to, we are preſented with another turn of mind. 'I am ſenſible,' ſays he, 'of 'the innocence of my life. I have 'done no wrong, neither has any vio-'lence been found in my hands; and 'yet my face is deformed with weep-'ing, and the ſhadow of death frowns 'upon my eye-brows. Yet, thus cir-'cumſtanced, and thus innocent, my 'prayer ſurely may be heard. Behold, 'even now my witneſs is in Heaven, 'and my Advocate is in the realms of the 'higheſt. My friends continually de-'ride me; but my tears plead ſilently 'with God. O that a man might plead 'his cauſe with God, even as the ſon 'of man pleadeth the cauſe of his 'friend!' In another of his ſpeeches there is a paſſage much to the ſame purpoſe. *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his ſeat; I would order my cauſe before him*

There is no doubt, Conſtantia, that in

in theſe ſentiments the patriarch was animated by the ſuffrage of conſcience. And there is not a paſſage in his whole ſtory that is fraught with more important inſtruction: for it may teach us that, under all the circumſtances of human calamity, our only refuge is in the Eternal Providence; and that our peace muſt be derived from that approving conſcience which may encourage us to refer our cauſe to God. From what other ſource can we, in ſuch circumſtances, look for happineſs? Dependent beings have it not to beſtow. Were man in his ſocial nature a more exalted creature, the diſpenſation of peace would not be in his power. He could not remove from others thoſe evils to which he ſhould himſelf be expoſed, nor brighten the proſpects of futurity, whither his influence cannot reach.

Man, as being circumſcribed in his nature, and ſubject to events which he cannot command, muſt, if left to himſelf, fluctuate in uncertainty, and ſtruggle with diſappointment; he, therefore, that would hope with confidence, and enjoy with ſecurity, muſt have a reſource which time and chance cannot affect. This can only be in that independent Being, in whoſe hands are *the iſſues of life and death.*

Shall we truſt to human power? *The ſtrength of man is but as the graſs of the field, and all the goodlineſs thereof as the flower that fadeth.* Shall we truſt to human riches? *Riches profit not in the day of wrath.* Shall we truſt to human wiſdom? *Wiſdom herſelf is the daughter of Affliction.* Shall wetruſt to human friendſhip? *In the day of adverſity there is no hope in man.* Can power preclude the attacks of misfortune? Can riches delight in the hour of mourning? Can wiſdom guard againſt the ſtratagems of chance? Has friendſhip a charm for the languor of ſickneſs? How feeble would theſe ſupports prove, Conſtantia, in the trying hour of adverſity; or in thoſe moments of awful ſuſpence, when we expect *the everlaſting doors* of futurity ſhall be thrown open, and we ſhall *enter in!*

Better founded, my friend, will be the ſupports of that man who refers his cauſe to God, and whoſe conſcience encourages him to rely on the eternal Providence. He depends on a power that is ſuperior to all events; on the riches of divine goodneſs, which can never be exhauſted; on that wiſdom which can ſee the remoteſt conſequences of things; and on that friendſhip which no caprice can change. The man of Uzz had the ſtrongeſt conviction of this truth: for experience had taught him that human greatneſs was *lighter than vanity itſelf*; that riches did actually *make themſelves wings and flee away*; that the wiſdom of man was *little more than that of the wild aſs's colt*; and that his friendſhip was ſcarce in proportion to his wiſdom. His three friends, whoſe knowledge ſhould have directed, and whoſe affection ſhould have ſoothed him, he often heard, with reaſonable impatience, preſcribing reſolutions to which human nature was not equal, endeavouring to deprive him of his greateſt ſupport, the conſciouſneſs of his integrity, and ſharpening his pains bymortifying reflections. Then it was, that, deſtitute of all earthly conſolation, he appealed to Heaven, and even wiſhed that, by a perſonal communication with the Supreme Power, he might be permitted to lay his cauſe before him.

It is our happineſs, Conſtantia, that this appeal of the patriarch is not neceſſary for us. The Chriſtian covenant, gracious in every diſpenſation, has given us *an Advocate with the Father*, who ſhall plead our cauſe: an Advocate who knoweth well the frailties of human nature, and whoſe interceſſion can never be ineffectual. Let us, my friend, make ourſelves acceptable to him; let us lay hold of thoſe terms of redemption which he has procured for us, and our eternal intereſts will be eſtabliſhed on a ſure foundation.

You, my Conſtantia, are among thoſe that have *choſen this good part*; you have laboured for the bread of immortality, and have left that *which periſheth* to the numbers who *diſquiet themſelves in vain.* Let ſuch be pitied, my friend, not deſpiſed; for ſpiritual pride has it's origin in ſuch contempt, and it is one of the many unchriſtian qualities of blind enthuſiaſm: nay, you ſhould even watch over your pity; for there is a kind of pity that is allied to contempt.

Born with the gentleſt heart, and ever accuſtomed to adore, with the pureſt piety, the Author of your being, your religion is become habitual, and you know not the difficulty with which a

heart long devoted to vice muſt be reformed.

Man, though born with faculties to reach through the depths of time, and powers to flouriſh through the ages of eternity, ſeldom looks beyond the preſent hour, or is affected but by preſent objects. The immortal ſoul, confined to this manſion of earth, becomes enamoured of her habitation, and in time perſuades herſelf that *here ſhe has a delight to dwell.* Hence ſhe is ſolicitous how ſhe may repair the tottering wall, and ſupport the frail fabrick. Yet ſurely this attachment is ſtrange, Conſtantia; ſince, notwithſtanding her ſolicitude for it's preſervation, this frame will ſoon fall, and very ſoon moulder into it's native earth. Yet a little while, and every breaſt that is now warm with hope, and buſy with deſign, ſhall drop into the cold and ſenſeleſs grave. The eye that is reading this page ſhall be cloſed in darkneſs, and the hand that writes it ſhall crumble into duſt!

In that hour when the immortal ſpirit ſhall exchange this tranſient being for the allotments of eternity! in that awful hour, Conſtantia, what ſhall ſupport us? Nothing, but the conſciouſneſs of a well-conducted life. That divine confidence in the Father of nature; that peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding; that ſerene affiance; that exalted repoſe of ſoul: theſe are the fruits of a life long reſigned to God, and directed by religion. Yet ſurely theſe are well worth our tranſient labours: if theſe are not ſecured, we have lived and we have toiled in vain; we have given *our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which ſatisfieth not.*

Live, my Conſtantia, ſupported by that gracious Power whom you ſerve, ſupported by his providence, and enlightened by his grace.

FRANCIS.

LETTER VI.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

WELCOME, ſweet PEACE OF CONSCIENCE! Lovely ſtranger! Daughter of religious duty, welcome! How heavy was my heart, how painful were my hours, in thy abſence! How gloomy and diſſatisfied! With what anxiety and uneaſineſs did I ariſe from the moſt comfortable of all duties, the holy ſacrifice of prayer! The incenſe ſeemed to riſe unacceptably: my prayers were feeble; they were unable to reach the throne of the Almighty, and *returned*, but not with happineſs, *to my own boſom.* To the poſſeſſion of thee, ſweet PEACE, what are riches and honours? What were the wealth of kingdoms, the acquiſition of worlds, purchaſed at thy expence?

O my paternal friend, how forcible is truth, divine truth! With what pleaſing conviction did every ray of it, that illumined your laſt letter, ſhine upon my heart! How poor did the intereſts, the pleaſures, of this world appear, when compared with the pure, *the peaceable wiſdom, that cometh from above!*

'*FATHER of Lights*, ever grant me 'this wiſdom! Let the prayers of my 'father and my friend co-operate with 'my own, at thy eternal throne, and 'procure for me the bleſſed influences 'of thy ſacred Spirit!'

This, my venerable guide, is the ſubſtance of my daily prayer, which, ſince I received your inſtructions, I have repeated with greater aſſiduity. I have ever been convinced, that the Divine concurrence was neceſſary to aſſiſt us in the diſcharge of our duty, as well as to direct us in the knowledge of it; but that emphatical prayer which concludes your letters, 'that the eternal Provi-'dence would enlighten me with his 'grace,' has given new force to my convictions.

I will not preſcribe to you the ſubject of your letters. I ſhall liſten with pleaſure and attention to your inſtructions, to whatever point of duty or of doctrine they may be directed; but allow me to wiſh, my reverend friend, that on this important doctrine of Grace I may ſoon receive your valuable obſervations.

Poſſibly this divine diſpenſation may be neceſſary in a greater or in a leſs degree than I ſuppoſe it to be. I have received different accounts of it from the profeſſors of our holy faith; but I think that all of them have concluded it to be neceſſary for us; though in what meaſure it was neceſſary, they have not agreed.

It is generally underſtood, that this Divine Grace is the conſequential privilege of Chriſtianity, purchaſed for us by

by him who died for our redemption; yet I have ſometimes thought that the author of the Book of Pſalms prayed for this enlightening grace, in that paſſage which you have quoted in one of your letters—'*My God, lighten my eyes, 'that I ſleep not the ſleep of death!*'

With reſpect to this opinion, as well as to the neceſſity or expedience of divine grace, and the degree in which it is diſpenſed, I hope for your kind inſtructions.

Thoſe books of flaming devotion, which you have adviſed me not to read, I own I have hitherto been too fond of. Particularly ſince I entered upon the conventual life, I have been much converſant in ſuch books. They were recommended to me by my lady abbeſs, who is a good woman; but her devotion ſeems not to be of that ſerene and temperate kind which you deſcribe and approve. She is unequal in her religious deportment, being ſometimes elevated, but more frequently depreſſed.

What do I not owe to you, my father, for procuring me the book of God in a language I underſtand? Agreeably to your directions, I make that my principal ſtudy, and truſt that *it is able to make me wiſe unto ſalvation.*

Never, I hope, in the heart of your Conſtantia, ſhall that ſpiritual pride you mention find a place. I am too ſenſible of their unhappy condition *who live without God in the world,* to look upon them with any other emotions than thoſe of compaſſion. With the heart that is deſtitute of religious peace, my own has been a fellow-ſufferer; and ſhould I triumph in my comparative happineſs or purity, ſhould I thence derive any ſentiments of contempt for others, the reflection would rather mortify than ſoothe me, ſince I ſhould appear to deſpiſe in them what I myſelf had been.

The hour of prayer is at hand—I come; daughters of devotion, I join you—and now will I once more intreat the Author of life and death long to ſpare Theodoſius, for the comfort and ſupport of

CONSTANCE.

LETTER VII.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

I Intended to make the diſpenſation of grace the ſubject of a letter, and I thank you for putting me in a method of treating it.

Your firſt queſtion is, whether this diſpenſation was only the conſequential privilege of Chriſtianity; or whether it was not alſo the privilege of Judaiſm.

The latter part of this propoſition you infer from that poetical petition of the Pſalmiſt—'*My God, lighten my 'eyes,*' &c. Now, Conſtantia, it is obvious enough to ſuppoſe that the king of Iſrael might pray for the illumination of the Divine Spirit, as his ſon and ſucceſſor prayed for wiſdom, though under their ſyſtem *there was no promiſe of the ordinary diſpenſations of grace.* It would be natural for a people who were *viſited by God,* and beheld, on ſo many occaſions, the interpoſition of his Providence, to apply to him for his aſſiſtance under the conflicts of religious duty. It would be ſtill more natural for them *who ſat in darkneſs,* to petition for that light, of which ſome emanations were communicated in the extraordinary influences of the Spirit, though, agreeably to the ſcheme of the eternal and unerring Providence, the perfection of it ſhould not be diſplayed till *the fulneſs of time.*

This may be ſufficient to anſwer your firſt queſtion, which is rather curious than uſeful.

With reſpect to the neceſſity or expedience of the Divine Grace, I have much more to ſay. The philoſophers of our ſyſtem, who weigh every thing in the ſcale of natural obligation, or moral aptitude, exclaim againſt this doctrine of grace. 'If you admit the impulſe 'of a ſuperior agent, where,' ſay they, 'is the moral agency of man? Beſides, 'is it agreeable to the fitneſs of things 'that God ſhould preſcribe a law to 'man, to which his moral powers alone 'are not adequate? This,' continue they, 'would be to make God an 'Egyptian taſk-maſter. The moral 'powers of man muſt be adequate to 'the duties appointed him, and the 'doctrine of grace is therefore ſuper-'fluous.'

At this avenue, which is opened by the Chriſtian philoſopher, in ruſhes the philoſopher of Nature. He takes up the argument where the other laid it down. 'You have very rightly ob-'ſerved, Sir,' ſays he, 'that God 'would be an Egyptian taſk-maſter, if 'he gave us a law that we were unable 'to live up to. Such, I inſiſt upon it, 'is the law that is ſaid to be from him. '—From him therefore it cannot be.'

Thus,

Thus, Conſtantia, you ſee the conſequence of philoſophizing in religion.—Give up one redoubt to the enemy, and he turns our batteries againſt us. To both theſe ungracious opponents, I ſhall give a ſhort anſwer. To the Chriſtian ſophiſt I ſay, that the powers of man may be inadequate to the law of religion, though it's origin was from God; and to the philoſopher of Nature I anſwer, that the law of religion may be from God, though the powers of man are inadequate to it. The ſame argument will prove both theſe points.

A perfect law might be given to imperfect beings without any impropriety: it might be given to make them exert to the utmoſt the powers of their nature, and ſtrain to higher degrees of virtue for the high prize of their calling—it might be intended to encourage an uſeful emulation, by making ſtill greater degrees of excellence attainable—it might be deſigned to prevent indifference and independence, which man would naturally have ſuffered to grow upon him, when ſecure, by his own power, of attaining to moral perfection, and of diſcharging every duty enjoined him. A dependence on the Almighty for aſſiſtance in the conduct of life is productive of many advantages: it prevents that pride and careleſsneſs which are too often the effect of ſecurity and independence; it opens an intercourſe with the Deity by prayer; which, though the moſt delightful part of religious duty, would become unneceſſary the moment that the aid of Divine grace ſhould be found to be ſo.

From theſe co-operating cauſes, Conſtantia, you ſee how expedient is the diſpenſation of grace. How neceſſary it is for us in our preſent ſtate, we need not make appeals to reaſon, but to experience.

To be ignorant of the ſacred truths of religion, and to be deſtitute of the communicable influences of God's Holy Spirit, has been always conſidered by good men as the moſt deplorable condition of human wretchedneſs. Hence we find it repreſented in the ſacred writings by the terrible images of darkneſs and death. *Thoſe*, ſays the prophet, *that ſat in darkneſs have ſeen a great light, and they that were in the region and the ſhadow of death, on them hath the light ſhined.—Awake, thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee light.—My God, lighten mine eyes that I ſleep not in death.* This was the petition of that prince, whoſe devotion was ſo pure and exalted, that the Almighty himſelf bore teſtimony to his excellence in pronouncing him *a man after his own heart.* And could he, *the light of Iſrael*—could he, diſtinguiſhed for his knowledge of the then revealed religion, could he, illumined with the ſpirit of prophecy, think it neceſſary to pray for the enlightening grace of Heaven, and ſhould not we much more?—we, who cannot, like the prophet, boaſt any ſuperior portion of the Divine Spirit, and who have yet, with him, the ſame propenſities to evil?

On us, indeed, *The Sun of Righteouſneſs hath ſhined.* To us is diſplayed a perfect knowledge of thoſe ſaving truths, thoſe exalted doctrines, that were then only ſeen in types and ſhadows. It is our happineſs to know the perfect will of God, revealed by his Son, Jeſus Chriſt. The ſacred Scriptures contain every thing neceſſary to ſalvation. There every moral duty is clearly ſtated, and every point of faith ſufficiently diſcovered. To theſe *fountains of light and immortality* we may apply, without deception, for that knowledge which *leadeth us into all truth.*

Bleſſed be the gracious Author of our ſalvation! *the veil of partition* is now taken away; thoſe types and figures, which were *the ſhadowings of good things to come*, are removed, and *we know what we worſhip.*

It is for us, then, on whom *the light hath ſhined*, to be willing, at leaſt, *to rejoice in that light.* It is for us, with unwearied aſſiduity to ſtudy the holy Scriptures, *which are able to make us wiſe unto ſalvation.* Whatever attainments we make in ſcience, if we neglect this, the only *true wiſdom*, our knowledge and our induſtry are vain. Whatever ſkill, whatever prudence we poſſeſs in the œconomy of this life, if the acquiſition has been made by the neglect of this knowledge, it is ſkill that darkens, and prudence that deſtroys.

The rude notices of natural reaſon alone can never be ſufficient to direct us in every part of our conduct. Thoſe lights, though uſeful and univerſal, are liable to be obſcured by the paſſions, to be enfeebled by vice, or miſled by

by error. The underſtanding may be made ſubſervient to the heart, and employed in the defence of what we wiſh, rather than what we ought to do. The force of truth may be overcome by habit; and, like the heathen ſtatuary, we may fall down before an image of our own framing. It is eſſentially neceſſary, therefore, that we ſhould have ſome certain rules of action, ſome plain directions laid down for our conduct, which can neither be perverted by ſophiſtry, nor miſconſtrued by error.

Such, Conſtantia, is the neceſſity of that external information which has been ordinarily diſpenſed to us by the Spirit of God; which, while I have been attending to, I have not loſt ſight of my argument.

The ſame cauſes which concur to make the outward evidences of the Spirit of God ſo neceſſary for our information, render the internal aids of his Grace as neceſſary for our direction and ſupport in the diſcharge of our duty.

To acquire a conſummate knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is not alone ſufficient to conduct us to the *land of everlaſting life*. Theſe are the leading ſtar by which we muſt direct our courſe; but other means are neceſſary to guard us from the tempeſt above, and the ſhoals below. The ocean of life is treacherous and uncertain. Many latent dangers await the paſſenger, and he is frequently in the greateſt peril when he thinks himſelf the moſt ſecure.

Shall I change the ſcene, and ſuppoſe that we have an earthly paſſage to the city *that is not made with hands?* Yet, in that caſe, how many circumſtances of danger to the traveller does the allegory afford me! A thouſand accidents concur to make us deviate from *the narrow way that leadeth to life*. We are on one ſide threatened by horrible precipices; on another, invited by proſpects of beauty: deſpair points out to us the length and difficulty of the journey, and wearineſs importunes us to ſeek the vallies of repoſe.

The object, indeed, at which we finally aim, would infinitely counterbalance every inconvenience. And *the ſufferings of the preſent time* will bear no compariſon *with the glory that ſhall be revealed* among *us*. But objects placed at a diſtance, however important, never ſtrongly affect us: as in the attraction of bodies; if thoſe with which they ſympathize be far removed, they will adhere to others more near, to which they have leſs relation.

Some portion of Divine Grace, ſome meaſure of God's Holy Spirit, is indiſpenſably neceſſary for every Chriſtian. Mere human wiſdom, though aſſiſted by the knowledge of the Divine Revelation, will not always be ſufficient to ſupport us in our duty. How often, with the conviction of truth upon us, are we inſenſibly drawn into the ways of error! How often, in the conſciouſneſs of determined integrity, are we betrayed into vice by the ſtratagems of temptation! Though we may in general be very ſenſible of our duty, yet we have not at all times the ſame capacity of attention, nor the ſame readineſs of apprehenſion, to diſtinguiſh good from evil. The faculties of the mind are ſometimes vigorous, and ſometimes languid. The will is frequently retained by idleneſs, or ſolicited by deſire, without receiving any inſtructions from reaſon; and the œconomy of the ſoul is oftener in diſorder than that of the body.

In ſuch circumſtances, Conſtantia, have we not need of ſome ſuperior aid? Want we not the directive influences of the Spirit of Wiſdom, to keep us in the narrow paths of duty? Can there be any doubt that the ordinary diſpenſations of Grace are neceſſary?

But in what degree, you aſk, is this grace ordinarily diſpenſed? To which I muſt beg leave to anſwer, that *God giveth not his Spirit by meaſure*. It is enough for us to know what he hath declared, that *his Grace is ſufficient for us*. It muſt be neceſſary in a greater or a leſs degree, in proportion to the different tempers, ſituations and circumſtances of mankind: and to the prayers and endeavours of each a ſufficiency thereof will be diſpenſed. To our prayers and endeavours, I ſay, it will be diſpenſed; agreeably to which we are told, that *our heavenly Father will give of his Holy Spirit to them that aſk it in his Son's name*. And while we are informed that *it is God who worketh in us*, we are commanded to *work out our own ſalvation*. Thus, Conſtantia, a ſufficiency of the Divine Grace is promiſed to our prayers—promiſed to co-operate with our endeavours. And it is thus, that the œconomy of grace interferes not with that freedom of will

on which all our merit, as rational creatures, is founded. Our prayers and endeavours are voluntary acts; and we are conſequently as much at liberty to lay hold of the diſpenſation of Grace as of Redemption, and as much at liberty to reject it, to reſiſt or to *quench* the Spirit.

Were not this the caſe, Conſtantia, were the diſpenſation of Grace entirely independent on our own will, the moral agency of man would be ſuperſeded, and the doctrine of rewards and puniſhments would be vain. If, according to the doctrine of fanaticks, the Grace of God be an impulſive principle, partially beſtowed, and actuating us as mere machines, then the Almighty has taken our ſalvation into his own hands, and rendered moral virtue an empty name.

But this doctrine will, on the concluſion, be found blaſphemous to God, and injurious to mankind. For, if God be the ſole agent of our ſalvation, to him it muſt be owing if any ſoul periſheth; and if moral virtue be vain, the flood-gates of vice may be thrown open, and the world be overwhelmed with the deluge.

But if God be the ſole author of our ſalvation, and if his Grace be an impulſive principle which we cannot reſiſt, then no ſoul ſhall periſh; for we are expreſsly told that *God is not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* If it ſhould be replied, that ſome do periſh; nay, that many go on *in the broad way to deſtruction*; then I anſwer, that God has not the power to do what he is willing to do. He is willing that none ſhould periſh, and yet you ſay that ſome do periſh, therefore there are ſome whom he has it not in his power to ſave. Now God is all powerful, conſequently he muſt have diſpenſed with his power in that reſpect by making the ſalvation of man conditional. If we accept not the mercies of the Goſpel on the terms that are offered to us, God himſelf can do no more for us—God himſelf cannot act inconſiſtently with his own laws. Every attribute of the ſupreme perfection muſt be perfect—Juſtice and truth are his eſſential attributes—his juſtice and his truth therefore muſt be perfect.

You ſee, my friend, how wretchedly founded is that fanatical doctrine, which repreſents the Grace of God as an irreſiſtible principle, acting unconditionally, and impelling men to ſalvation. You ſee what diſhonour it would bring upon the Deity, what diſorder amongſt mankind, and how inconſiſtent it is with the ſacred writings.

If, therefore, the Grace of God be a conditional, not an irreſiſtible principle, it will, as I obſerved before, be diſpenſed only in a ſufficient degree: that is, it will effectually co-operate with our own endeavours in working out our ſalvation. More than this we have no right to expect from the Grace of God. Infinite Wiſdom will not do what is not neceſſary to be done. The extraordinary influences of the Spirit have ceaſed, becauſe they are no longer requiſite.

Saint Paul himſelf, in his Firſt Epiſtle to the converts at Corinth, tells them, that the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit ſhould ceaſe, but that Charity, which was a moral grace of Chriſtians, ſhould ſtill remain, in conſequence of thoſe ordinary diſpenſations of the Spirit, that ſhould continue with the church.

Whatever, therefore, appears to exceed theſe ordinary influences of Grace, the raving flights of enthuſiaſm, and the rage of fanatick zeal; the ſudden impulſes of devotional rapture, and the wild reveries of Tartuffian dreamers; all theſe are the fruits of inſane imagination, and cannot proceed from that pure and peaceable Spirit which cometh from *the Father of Lights.*

The office of that Spirit is to inform the mind with a right ſenſe of it's duty, and to animate and encourage it in the diſcharge of it. In this light it is properly called by our Redeemer, that Comforter which ſhould *lead us into all truth, and teach us all things.*

How much are thoſe offices miſrepreſented by the followers of Calvin, and by enthuſiaſts of every denomination! What viſionary communications, what ſuggeſtions of ſick fancy, have thoſe delirious dreamers imputed to the Spirit of wiſdom! as if God would render vain that faculty of reaſon which characterizes man by his own image; and as if the enlightening Spirit of Grace would rather obſcure than illuminate the underſtanding; theſe unthinking men have charged upon the operations of that Spirit the moſt extravagant effects of wild inſanity. Under the influence of imaginary calls, ſome have preached, and ſome have propheſied. The mechanick

chanick has forſaken his awl, and his wife her diſtaff, and with heads full of glorious viſions, together they have iſſued into the ſtreets and highways to publiſh the everlaſting Goſpel.

It will always be difficult for devout ignorance to diſtinguiſh between the ſuggeſtions of imagination, and the influences of the Divine Spirit. Unaccuſtomed to abſtracted thinking, or even to draw concluſions from the moſt ſimple propoſitions, the ignorant are unable to form any judgment of that mode of inſpiration, which ſhould be moſt conſiſtent with the wiſdom of Providence. They conſider not that it muſt be more agreeable to Infinite Knowledge to invigorate the nobler faculty of reaſon, and to bring the paſſions into ſubjection, than by inflaming *them* to weaken that faculty, and by ſo doing *to put darkneſs for light*. Hence all the waking dreams of blind enthuſiaſm are cheriſhed and reſpected as the offspring of Grace; and the miſtaken viſionary aſcribes to the Author of Reaſon, ſuch impulſes and communications as could only exiſt in a mind where reaſon was impotent.

But the deluſions of innocent enthuſiaſm would hardly deſerve attention, were they not ſometimes productive of conſequences that render that enthuſiaſm no longer innocent. From the belief of divine impulſes, the flames of perſecution have been lighted, and the altars of ſuperſtition have been adorned; the ſanguinous have been prompted to indulge their natural thirſt of blood, and the gloomy have forſaken the ſociety of human creatures, and inhabited caves and cells in ſolitary ſanctity. This ſpecies of religious retirement I have ever condemned: but my objections do not affect the conventual life; for there is great difference between retiring to a cave in ſome unfrequented deſart, and entering into a religious ſociety*. Many more than theſe have been the effects of miſtaken impulſes. The hiſtory of the church in every period abounds with them.

Yet how eaſy is it, upon reflection, to guard againſt theſe deluſions! What is the end of Divine Grace? It is only to aid us in the knowledge and in the diſcharge of our duty. Therefore, whatever impulſe hath other tendencies than theſe, it cannot be of God, becauſe it is not agreeable to his wiſdom to do what is ſuperfluous. A ſufficiency of his Grace is what alone he hath promiſed us, and what alone it is conſiſtent with Infinite Wiſdom to give. Will the Father of Lights amuſe his creatures with dreams and reveries? Will he ſport with their paſſions, depreſs and elevate, enflame and diſtract them? Will he not rather aſſiſt *ſuch as call upon him faithfully*, to bring thoſe paſſions into ſubjection; and to confirm in it's proper empire the nobler principle of reaſon? Is not ſuch the mode of operation that the all-wiſe Creator would aſſign to his aſſiſting Spirit? *The wiſdom that cometh from above*, we are told, *is pure and peaceable*: ſuch wiſdom is congenial with our reaſon, which is a clear and ſteady principle; and therefore it muſt act in concurrence with that principle; at leaſt, it's effects cannot be repugnant to it's conceptions.

Thus, Conſtantia, by the information of the revealed word, and by the uſe of that reaſon which God has given us that we may be able to underſtand his will, we learn the nature of ſuch diſpenſations as his wiſdom hath thought proper to communicate to us.

I have extended my obſervations on this ſubject farther than you deſired, or might expect, becauſe the doctrine of Grace is an important ſubject, and the right underſtanding of it may not only preſerve us from many abſurdities and indecencies in religious duty, but from many dangerous errors both in practice and belief. When once the heart gives itſelf up to blind fanaticiſm, we cannot tell to what attempts it may be ſeduced, or where the influences of unreſtrained and (what will always be the conſequence) of miſdirected paſſions may lead us. When the imagination triumphs over reaſon, the œconomy of the mind is deſtroyed; and Confuſion, with Inſanity in her rear, approaches, and uſurps the empire of the ſoul.

May every miniſtering ſpirit of Heaven guard the peace of my Conſtantia! May her piety be uniformly rational

* There is, indeed, as Father Francis obſerves, a difference between theſe two ſorts of retirement; but, in the Editor's opinion, the difference lies only in the mode; for they are equally repugnant to the determinations of Providence, which has made the whole moral duty of man to conſiſt in the ſocial capacity of ſerving his fellow-creatures.

and calm! May the incenſe of her devotion riſe from the altar of reaſon, the voluntary ſacrifice of gratitude! May ſhe ever *know whom ſhe worſhips*, and remember that an intellectual Being requireth an intellectual adoration! In every act of worſhip, and in every point of duty, may ſhe be conſtantly ſupported and directed by the pure and peaceable Spirit of Truth! By that Spirit may ſhe be enlightened to diſcern thoſe finer relations that exiſt between the Creator and the creature, undiſtinguiſhed by the eye of human intelligence; and learn from thence not only what is due, but what is acceptable to God. Under every circumſtance of life may ſhe be happy in eaſe, or contented in reſignation; and when the ſhort thread of life is ſpun, when ſhe enters upon the inheritance of immortality, may ſhe receive the fulneſs of the bleſſings which Infinite Benevolence has in reſerve for thoſe *that honour him as he ought to be honoured.*

FRANCIS.

LETTER VIII.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

HOW beautiful does the religion of Chriſtians appear, when beheld with the eye of reaſon! How amiable the benevolent Author of it! Surely, my revered friend, there is a ſecret delight in the inveſtigation of divine truths, and the diſcovery of them affords the greateſt of pleaſures. Your moſt obliging letter on the ſubject of Grace gave you, I preſume, no leſs ſatisfaction in the writing, than it afforded me in the peruſal; and I think I can diſcern, in the more animated paſſages of that letter, thoſe pleaſing ſenſations you felt when the light of religious truth ſhone the cleareſt to your eye. If I am not miſtaken in this, and if your pleaſure in writing that letter were equal to that which I found in reading it, you have had a better reward than my gratitude can give you.

You have juſtified the ſcheme of Providence in the diſpenſation of Grace, againſt every objection that has been or can be brought againſt it. You have placed in a clear light the benevolent purpoſes of the Father of Mercies in that diſpenſation, who has made man dependent on him for the aſſiſtance of his divine Spirit, only becauſe he has a delight to give it, and becauſe it muſt be the happineſs and comfort of his creatures to receive it. It plainly appears from your account of it, that the œconomy of grace interferes not with that freedom of will on which all moral goodneſs muſt be founded, and without which we could neither be capable of virtue nor vice; neither entitled to rewards, nor liable to puniſhment. It appears that the moral agency of man may be exerciſed in the application of the Divine Grace, and that he is at liberty either to apply or to reject it.

With reſpect to the degree in which it is diſpenſed, you have, no doubt, rightly obſerved, that as God will not do what is unneceſſary, no more than a ſufficiency of it will be granted to our prayers: and as to the mode of it's operation, it is ſurely conſiſtent with the wiſdom that gave us reaſon for our direction, to render by his grace the efforts of that reaſon effectual, in ſubjecting the paſſions, and reducing them to the obedience of his holy laws. By a rational worſhip, you have obſerved, in a former letter, that God is moſt honoured; when, from a due and diſpaſſionate conſideration of his benevolent works, we come, from a principle of gratitude, to offer him a *reaſonable ſacrifice*. This ſacrifice would indeed be no longer reaſonable, were we irreſiſtibly impelled to offer it by the influences of a ſuperior agency: we ſhould then be the inſtruments of a worſhip paid to God, but we ſhould not be the worſhippers; and with what delight ſhould the eternal Wiſdom look upon our ſacrifice, when conſcious that it proceeded not from a voluntary diſcharge of duty, but was the inevitable conſequence of his own agency? With what propriety could he ſay, *Well done, thou good and faithful ſervant*; when he himſelf has been the agent, and the ſervant no more than a machine in his hands? To ſuppoſe, then, that the Divine Grace is an irreſiſtible principle, muſt be *to charge God fooliſhly*; and whatever reverence I have heretofore paid to thoſe miſdeeming enthuſiaſts who have this doctrine, I muſt now retract it, and ſhall, for the future,

future, rather pity them as miſtaken, than reſpect them as inſpired.

But I will own to you, my paternal friend, that I ſhould not ſo eaſily have become the diſciple of Reaſon, had you made that faculty a dictator on it's own authority; when you only make it inſtrumental in the application of truths revealed, as that is, undoubtedly, the purpoſe for which it was given us, I cannot but agree with you in every concluſion you have made.

How ſhall I thank you for the repeated inſtances of your care and kindneſs, for thoſe ardent wiſhes that glow in the laſt page of your letter, thoſe prayers for your Conſtantia's happineſs and ſafety? O may they be heard at the throne of everlaſting mercy! and riſe not unaccompanied with thoſe daily offerings which ſhe delights in making for the preſervation of her friend. Adieu.

CONSTANCE.

LETTER IX.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

AS you were not diſpleaſed with my account of the diſpenſation of grace, I will now give you my thoughts on a duty, to the due diſcharge of which that diſpenſation is promiſed. I have obſerved before, that were the grace of God an unconditional and irreſiſtible principle, our prayers would be ſuperfluous. Had the Almighty Providence formed an irreverſible decree with reſpect to our ſalvation, or were he totally uninfluenced by any thing that we ſhould do in order to obtain the aid of his Sacred Spirit, our acts of devotion would be as abſurd as every other act of duty would be vain. Yet there are many, Conſtantia, who hold this doctrine; becauſe the Chriſtian covenant is called the covenant of grace, they annihilate the moral agency of man, and repreſent him as entirely paſſive in the accompliſhment of his ſalvation. I have ſufficiently expoſed the errors of this unſcriptural doctrine, and ſhall therefore proceed to conſider prayer as one of *the means of grace*.

Our Saviour himſelf, who *died for our ſins, and roſe again for our juſtification*, (that is, for our deliverance from eternal death; for the word *juſtification* in the ſacred writings generally ſignifies deliverance, and in that ſenſe I underſtand it in this paſſage) our Saviour himſelf, I ſay, whoſe merits with the Father were the primary means of procuring us this grace, expreſsly convinceth us that it is to be obtained by prayer. For, in the firſt place, this was the method by which he propoſed to obtain it for us—*I will pray to the Father*, ſays he, *and he will ſend you another Comforter, who ſhall abide with you always*; and, in the next place, he aſſures his diſciples, that his heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that aſk it. The paſſage is expreſs to the purpoſe. *I ſay unto you, aſk and it ſhall be given you, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be opened unto you. For every one that aſketh receiveth; and he that ſeeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it ſhall be opened. Which of you, being a father, if his ſon ſhall aſk bread, will give him a ſtone? Or if a fiſh, will he for a fiſh give him a ſerpent? Nay, and if he ſhould aſk an egg, will he give him a ſcorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much rather ſhall your Father, who is in Heaven, give the Holy Spirit to them that aſk him?* The pains that the Divine Reaſoner hath taken to convince his diſciples upon this point of faith, are very remarkable. He firſt commands, or rather exhorts them to offer their prayers to God; then, for their encouragement, he aſſures them that ſuch prayers are heard and granted; and afterwards, for their conviction, he infers an undeniable concluſion from a parity of reaſon. Thus there remains no doubt, that as the mediation of Chriſt is the primary, ſo prayer is the ſecondary means of Grace.

In what words, then, and with what ſpirit ſhall we pray? *Where-withal ſhall we come before the Lord, and humble ourſelves before the high God?* Is not, it may be aſked, that form of prayer which our Saviour taught his diſciples, comprehenſive of *all* our wants, and *ſufficient* for the Chriſtian church in all ages? Should this queſtion be put, I would anſwer in the negative. The prayer which our Saviour taught his diſciples was a temporary form. The redemption of mankind was not then accompliſhed; the means of grace were not effectuated. The Saviour of the

world was not aſcended into Heaven, and it was in conſequence of his aſcenſion only, that *the Comforter*, the *Spirit of Truth*, was granted to the church. *If I go not away*, ſays he, *the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go away, I will ſend him unto you.* It was impoſſible, therefore, that he ſhould teach his diſciples to pray for that grace which was not yet attainable, nor communicated, except in an eſpecial manner. Some ſubtle interpreters have, indeed, ſuppoſed, that the meaning of 'thy kingdom come,' in the prayer above-mentioned, is metaphorical, and that the influence of grace is thereby ſignified; but, ſetting aſide thoſe arguments I have brought againſt the poſſibility of this interpretation, I would aſk theſe men, whether it be probable that the wiſe Author of our ſalvation ſhould teach his diſciples to expreſs ſo important a petition by a diſtant metaphor? Whether he who taught them plainly to ſay, 'Give us this day our 'daily bread;' would not, if it had been then proper, have taught them as plainly to ſay, 'Give us the grace of 'thy Holy Spirit;' or to have expreſſed themſelves in ſome other form of words as clear, and as much to the purpoſe. Had the words, *thy kingdom come*, no ſignification that was literally obvious, they might as well have been wreſted to one ſenſe as to another; but the kingdom of God was an expreſſion familiar to the ears of the diſciples, and to them it required no comment. They knew that it meant the eſtabliſhment of the Meſſiah's evangelical kingdom. Another argument that this form of prayer was temporary, and is now inſufficient, is this, that the apoſtles made uſe of other prayers. To prove this, it is not neceſſary to adduce a ſingle inſtance, becauſe numbers offer themſelves.

Neither is it neceſſary for me to inſtruct you, Conſtantia, in what words you ſhould pray for the aſſiſtance of the Divine Spirit. Eloquence is in no wiſe eſſential to prayer; it may be neceſſary for the perſuaſion of men, but God *ſetteth it at nought*. Let us not think that we ſhall be heard the ſooner for our *much ſpeaking*, nor yet for the elegance of our expreſſion. If we pray by a ſet form, let the language of it be artleſs and unaffected, and in that reſpect reſemble the *ſingleneſs* or ſimplicity of heart, with which we ſhould offer it to the all-knowing Wiſdom. I would readily give you ſuch a form as I ſpeak of, but the church alloweth not a private eccleſiaſtick to compoſe and communicate a form of prayer. For you, however, whoſe underſtanding is clear, and whoſe memory is retentive, who digeſt your thoughts with propriety, and expreſs them with eaſe, ſcarce any form of private devotion is neceſſary*.

With regard to the ſpirit and manner wherewith we ought to approach the eternal Providence, we cannot be too attentive to ſo important a circumſtance. We ſhould endeavour, as much as poſſible, to be ſerene and recollected. Before we addreſs that almighty Being, we ſhould meditate a moment on his ſublime perfections, and fill our minds with the idea of his glorious attributes. But rather let us contemplate him in his benevolent, than in his judicial capacity. We ought, indeed, never to be without the idea of the latter; but the firſt ſhould always have the leading influence in our minds. Our heavenly Father treated us not as ſervants, but as ſons; our acts of obedience, therefore, to him ſhould be purely filial. He delighteth not in the proſtration of ſervile fear, but in the chearful worſhip of reverential gratitude. Let us not approach him with the cries and lamentations of Moloch's worſhippers, nor with the ſelf-caſtigation of the votaries of Baal. Yet, on this, as well as on every other occaſion, let us remember the vaſt diſtance between fallen man and his Creator; let us conſider that our God, though ſeated on the throne of everlaſting mercy, is an offended Being, whoſe laws we have broken, and to whoſe favour we have forfeited our natural right. Theſe reflections will make us approach him with that humble and dependent ſpirit, which muſt become a frail and erring creature, in the preſence of it's almighty and all-perfect Judge.

Let the incenſe we offer him be the pure and undiſſembled devotion of the heart. Let us avoid the Phariſaical oſtentation of long prayers. Our moral

* How idle have been all the diſputes concerning the preference of praying by *form*, or praying *extempore*! Both have the preference in their proper place; the former in publick, the latter in private devotion.

and

and religious, as well as our natural wants, may be expreſſed in few words; and God is not ſlow to hear. One penitential ſigh, one humble acknowledgment, will find it's way to Heaven. One earneſt petition for the Divine Aſſiſtance, one ſincere expreſſion of gratitude, will be as effectual as a thouſand repetitions. Diffuſe and declamatory prayer is a mark of fanaticiſm, the bold and extravagant effuſion of *holy impudence*. Shall we think that the Divine Wiſdom is to be courted by *much ſpeaking?* Is it neceſſary that the ſincere of heart ſhall weary Heaven with long importunity? Would not this be to ſuppoſe that God is hard to be entreated, or that his ear is obſtructed, *and cannot hear?* How brief is that temporary form of prayer which our Saviour taught his diſciples! Does that form contain one mere ſuperfluous word, or one mere collateral or unimportant thought! Is the imagination indulged in vain deſcriptions, or are the paſſions rouzed to eager imprecations? as if the Divine Author of it had foreſeen the idle prolixity of thoſe ranting prayers which ſhould be uſed in future ages of the church, he has in the abovementioned form been remarkably conciſe. There is not, perhaps, in any language, an inſtance of compoſition where ſo much is expreſſed in ſo few words.

It muſt be owned, however, that to expreſs our thoughts with brevity and preciſion, muſt be the effect of literary ſkill with us, as it was of divine knowledge with the Author of the diſciples prayer. But from the brevity of that prayer we may learn, what may be of more general uſe, to offer no ſuperfluous addreſſes to the Almighty. If we look into many of our modern forms of prayer, particularly ſuch as have been compoſed by Chriſtians for their private uſe, and afterwards printed for the ſervice of the publick, we ſhall find that this precept has been very much neglected. With a profuſion of depreciating expreſſions, partly taken from the ſacred writings, and partly the coinage of their own imaginations, as if they would make a merit of their ſelf-abaſement, they are loud in complaining of themſelves as the worſt of creatures. This is a burleſque upon Chriſtian humility. I have known a pious lady, whoſe life was one continued ſcene of devotion, daily repeat theſe humiliating lyes, when ſhe offered up her prayers to the Father of truth and wiſdom. Our Saviour's approbation of the publican's prayer affords no argument in favour of theſe. The publican was ſuppoſed to be really a ſinner, not in the ordinary, but in the extraordinary ſenſe of the word; yet even he makes *no parade of humiliation*. He, though a publican, does not call himſelf the worſt of men; but ſaith ſimply, 'God 'be merciful to me a ſinner!' This was all that he ſaid, and all that was neceſſary for him to ſay.

Theſe over-abaſing forms of prayer are not only improper for the Chriſtian who leads a regular life, but muſt likewiſe be repugnant to his conſcience, and obnoxious to his ſincerity. It is impoſſible that, while he is ſenſible of his good diſpoſition, and endeavours to live according to the Divine laws, he ſhould believe himſelf to be the wicked wretch that his prayers repreſent him.

I have yet one objection more to theſe humiliating rants, theſe effuſions of fanaticiſm. They are not only improper for the good man, but unneceſſary for the ſinner—at leaſt, on the part of God they are unneceſſary: for, of God can it be ſuppoſed, that he is ignorant of our conduct, and muſt learn it from a multitude of ſelf-abaſing words? Or ſhall we think that he delights in the frequent mention of that wickedneſs, the practice of which offended him? Or may we believe that he will be prevailed upon by the loudneſs of tautological declamation? If theſe things are not to be ſuppoſed, we ſhall conclude that theſe harangues of ſelf-abaſement are unneceſſary with reſpect to God, and that it will be more proper, as well as more modeſt, for the ſinner to uſe the brief acknowledgment of the publican.

Long and loud confeſſions of ſin before God are always marks of a weak underſtanding: nay, I have known ſome eccleſiaſticks ſo extremely injudicious as to recommend this practice in private devotion; and ſo weak as to adviſe us, in our addreſſes to God, to mention particularly the ſeveral ſins we have been guilty of. Is not this to ſuppoſe *that God is even ſuch a one as ourſelves?* Or is it not to conceive yet *more* meanly of him? When a perſon is diſpoſed to aſk forgiveneſs of thoſe whom he has offended, and to acknowledge his faults, would a generous mind be delighted with

with the recapitulation of them? Would it not rather be painful to a generous mind? And ſhall we dare to think that man is poſſeſſed of greater generoſity, or more enlarged conceptions, than that infinite Being from whom he derives both? Why, then, ye ſelf-abaſing ſinners, will ye weary God with your miſtaken prayers? Why will ye offer to the Divine ear what it delighteth not to hear? Can ye not be humble, without importuning Heaven with your ACTS of humility? Is not this a ſpecies of *eye-ſervice?*

Let us conſider the parable of the prodigal ſon, which may in ſome meaſure be looked upon as a form of repentance. He had meditated, we are told, a ſhort ſpeech of acknowledgment. '*Father,* '*I have ſinned againſt Heaven, and in* '*thy ſight, and no longer am worthy to* '*be called thy ſon; make me as one of* '*thy hired ſervants.*' This confeſſion he meditated, and this was as brief, for the circumſtances, as the prayer of the publican. But what do we find in the ſequel of the ſtory? We find that this ſhort ſpeech was rendered ſtill ſhorter by the omiſſion of the laſt clauſe. The penitent ſon, after he had met with ſuch a gracious reception from his father, probably concluded that ſuch a humiliating overture would give him pain; or if he were about to make it, the father interrupted him, by calling to his ſervants, and ordering the beſt robes. Obſerve, my Conſtantia, the ſkill of the ſacred paraboliſt in this place. *And the ſon ſaid unto him,* '*Father, I have ſinned* '*againſt Heaven, and in thy ſight, and* '*no longer am worthy to be called thy ſon.*' —*But the father ſaid unto his ſervants,* '*Bring forth the prime robe, and put it* '*upon him.*' Is not the omiſſion of the laſt clauſe in the premeditated ſpeech, (*make me as one of thy hired ſervants*) after ſuch a reception, remarkably beautiful? When this is conſidered, does it appear in the leaſt probable that the father ſhould either expect, or take delight in a detail of his ſon's follies and vices?

As an act of repentance, with reſpect to God, ſuch a detail cannot be neceſſary: for what is repentance, but a relinquiſhment of ſins; from a conviction that they have offended the Judge of the world?

I have ſaid more on this circumſtance than I at firſt intended, and poſſibly more than you may think it required: but nothing is unimportant that relates to the worſhip of God, or that contributes any thing to rectify that worſhip.

For this reaſon, you will favour me with your attention, while I point out ſome other errors that I have obſerved in forms of devotion. Among theſe are impertinent expreſſions, ſuch as have no immediate relation either to the general or particular purpoſes of prayer; ſuch as are introduced merely for parade, or ſuch as have no other end than to fill the harmony of a period, or to form the ſide of an antitheſis. Of theſe I could produce many inſtances, from almoſt every form of prayer, whether publick or private, from profuſe expatiations on the paſt and preſent works of God, and from ſuperfluous details of our conduct towards him; when with careful minuteneſs we inform him of circumſtances which he knows better than ourſelves.

Neither can I approve of thoſe devout rhapſodies, thoſe *ſportings* of zeal, that holy *dalliance* with God, which ſwell the morning and evening devotions of many pious Chriſtians. Theſe deſultory effuſions are inconſiſtent with that reverence which is due to an Almighty Being.

In ſhort: Let us, when we pray, be modeſt, humble, calm, and recollected; and let our forms of prayers be chaſte, ſubdued, conciſe, and pertinent.

When we approach the Almighty, let us not borrow our ideas of him from human characteriſticks: let us remember, *that his ways are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts;—that as much as Heaven is higher than the earth, ſo much are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.* This reflection will at all times teach us a becoming reverence for our glorious Creator; and particularly, in our addreſſes to him, it will ſuggeſt to us the impropriety of vain and impertinent declamation, of the oſtentatious effuſions of fanatick impudence, and the importunate familiarities of forward zeal.

Adieu! my Conſtantia. May you offer up your prayers in an acceptable time!

FRANCIS.

LETTER

LETTER X.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

YOUR letters diſpleaſe me, my paternal friend; they make me diſpleaſed with myſelf. Every page is a mirror that reflects ſome circumſtance of folly or ignorance in my paſt conduct. When I compare my opinions and my practice with thoſe which you recommend, I am mortified with beholding ſome eſſential difference.—But go on, dear, cruel inſtructor; go on to humble the proud heart of your Conſtantia; make her ſee, in yet many more inſtances, what a weak, ignorant, ſhort-ſighted, creature ſhe is.

But indeed you ought to conquer that vanity, which in former days you contributed to ſtrengthen; when, too prodigal of compliment, you would overrate the talents of your Conſtantia; and, in the humility of tender affection, would profeſs yourſelf her pupil! Be patient, and indulge me. You make me ſenſible of my weakneſs: I am yet a woman, and muſt complain; I will have my revenge, and convince *you* of your errors. Do I not owe much of my pride and vanity to you? Did you not, in the days of flattering love, cheriſh and ſupport thoſe unſerviceable foibles? Having no other ambition than to pleaſe Theodoſius, if he appeared ſatisfied with my accompliſhments, I thought them ſufficient: if he praiſed my talents, I believed them to be great; and was indifferent about new acquiſitions of knowledge. Thus, my friend, I bring a heavy charge againſt you, and impute to you, in ſome meaſure, my pride and ignorance. Thus it is, that while your letters convince me of the latter, I gratify the firſt by a flattering excuſe. Poor Conſtantia! how much of human weakneſs doſt thou yet retain!

You have much to do, my venerable guide, much to do, before you ſhall have rendered your pupil as wiſe and as good as ſhe ought to be.

What means this uneaſineſs that hangs upon my heart? Surely your letter, your valuable letter, could not cauſe it. And yet, I think, I had leſs pleaſure from it than from any other that you have written to me. Was it becauſe you have not ſo often appealed to me by the endearing name of *your* Conſtantia? To you, my confeſſor, my guide, and friend, I can open all my weakneſs. What means this uneaſineſs that hangs upon my heart?

CONSTANCE.

LETTER XI.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

AMIABLE tenderneſs! Dear Conſtantia! ſet your heart at eaſe. Exert your reaſon; tax your fortitude; call forth the nobler faculties of your mind, and charge them to aſſert their empire over the wayward paſſions.

While we are in this ſtate of being, we muſt encounter difficulties, and ſtruggle with uneaſineſs. The heart will often be diſſatisfied we know not why, and reaſon will ſtand an idle ſpectator, as if unconſcious of it's power. In ſuch caſes it ought to be awakened from it's lethargy, and reminded of the taſk to which it is appointed. It ſhould be informed of the high office it bears in the œconomy of the ſoul, and be made acquainted with the inſidious vigilance of it's enemies.

But while we languiſh under the uneaſineſs of diſcontent, we cannot take a more effectual method to recover our peace, than to conſider the inſignificancy of every paſſion that centers, and purſuit that terminates here. Suppoſe our earthly aims were directed to their object by the favouring gale of fortune; ſuppoſe our purſuits ſhould be crowned with all the ſucceſs that flattering hope aſſigns them; yet, vain, changeable, and impotent as we are, the ſucceſs would not be worth a moment's triumph. While the heart turns upon an earthly axis, like the periſhable ball that it loves, it will be variouſly affected by outward influences. Sometimes it will bear the fruits of gladneſs, and ſometimes be the barren deſart of melancholy; one while it will be exhilarated by the ſunſhine of pleaſure, and again it will languiſh in the gloom of diſcontent. The cauſe of this is, not only that the human heart is in itſelf changeable and uncertain, deriving it's ſenſations from conſtitutional influences, but that the objects, if they are earthly objects, on which it depends for happineſs, are liable to variation and decay.

Hence

Hence ariſes the ſuperiority of religious views. When our hopes of happineſs are fixed on one certain event; one event which, though remote, cannot be altered by mortal contingencies; the heart has an invariable foundation whereon it may reſt. Without this reſting place, we ſhould be *toſſed to and fro with every wind* of fortune, the ſport of chance, and the dupes of expectation. To this immoveable anchor of the ſoul religion directs us in the hopes of immortality. We know from the unerring word of Divine Revelation, that we ſhall exiſt in another ſtate of being, after the diſſolution of this; and we are confirmed by every benevolent purpoſe of Providence, in the belief that our future exiſtence ſhall be infinitely happy. In this glorious hope the intereſts of a temporary life are ſwallowed up and loſt. This hope, like the ſerpent of Aaron, devours the mock-phantoms which are created by the magick of this world, and at once ſhews the vanity of every earthly purſuit.

Compared with this proſpect, my Conſtantia, how poor, how barren would every ſcene of mortal happineſs appear! How deſpicable at the beſt—yet how liable to be deſtroyed by every ſtorm of adverſity! For, are we not expoſed to a thouſand accidents, the moſt trifling of which may be ſufficient to break a ſcheme of felicity? Let us conſider thoſe conditions that are almoſt univerſally deſired, the dignity of the great, and the affluence of the rich. Are theſe above the reach of misfortune? Are they exempt from the importunities of care? Greatneſs is but the object of impertinence and envy, and riches create more wants than they are able to gratify. Should then our wiſhes lead to theſe, we ſhould unavoidably be diſappointed. The acquiſition might for a while ſoothe our vanity, but we ſhould ſoon ſigh for the eaſe of obſcurity, and envy the content of thoſe whom pride would call our vaſſals.

If wealth or grandeur, then, cannot afford us happineſs, where ſhall we ſeek it? Is it to be found in the cell of the hermit? or does it watch by the taper of ſolitary learning? Loves it the ſociety of laughing mirth? or does it affect the penſive pleaſures of meditation? Is it only genuine in the cordiality of friendſhip, or in the laſting tenderneſs of married love? Alas! my Conſtantia, this train of alternatives will not do. Should we fly from the trouble of ſociety to ſome lonely hermitage, we ſhould ſoon ſigh for the amuſements of the world we had quarrelled with. The ſtrongeſt mind could not long ſupport the burden of uncommunicated thought, and the firmeſt heart would languiſh in the ſtagnation of melancholy.

Aſk the ſolitary ſcholar, if ever, in his learned reſearches, he beheld the retreat of happineſs—Amuſement is all that he will pretend to—Amuſement! in queſt of which the active powers of the mind are frequently worn out, the underſtanding enervated by the aſſiduity of attention, and the memory overburdened with uneſſential ideas.

Yet, poſſibly, happineſs may mingle with ſociety, and ſwell the acclamations of feſtive mirth. No; the joy that dwells there cannot be called happineſs; for the noiſe of mirth will vaniſh with the echo of the evening, and *even in laughter the heart is ſad.* If we are able to diſtinguiſh the elegance of converſation, we ſhall often be diſguſted with the arrogance of pride, or the impertinence of folly; and if not, we may be amuſed indeed with the noiſe, but can never taſte the pleaſures of ſociety.

As little reaſon have we to hope for laſting happineſs from the engagements of friendſhip or of love. The condition of human life is at beſt ſo uncertain, that it is even dangerous to form any connections that are dear. The tenderneſs of love, my Conſtantia, opens the heart to many ſufferings, to many painful apprehenſions for the health and ſafety of it's object, and many uneaſy ſenſations both from real and imaginary cauſes. It was from this conviction I told you, in the letter wherein I firſt diſcovered myſelf to you, 'that the love 'we have had for one another will make 'us more happy in it's diſappointment, 'than it could have done in it's ſucceſs.'

For want of a better remedy to theſe evils, the wiſdom of ancient philoſophy teacheth us to bid a brave defiance to the aſſaults of pleaſure and of pain. This precept it urges with unremitting auſterity; without making any allowance for particular tempers or circumſtances; without inſtructing us how to behave

behave to the ſolicitations of joy or pleaſure; how to defend the heart from the inroads of ſorrow, or guard againſt the unſeen ſtratagems of diſtreſs.

But the religion of a Chriſtian affords a nobler and a ſafer refuge. With the exalted hopes that this preſents to us, *the ſufferings of the preſent time are not worthy to be compared.* In thoſe glorious hopes let us bury every anxious thought, the uneaſineſs of diſcontent, and the ſolicitude of care. Let us not ſink under our light afflictions, which are but for a moment. A very few years, perhaps a few months or days, may bring us into that ſtate of being, where care and miſery perplex no more. *Though we have now our bed in darkneſs, and our pillow on the thorn,* yet the time draweth nigh when we ſhall taſte of life without anguiſh, and enjoy the light without *bitterneſs of ſoul. The night is far ſpent,* my Conſtantia, *the day is at hand; let us therefore gird up the loins of our mind, and be ſober*—no longer diſſipated, or diſturbed with the troubles of this world. We are hourly haſting to that ſcene of exiſtence, *where the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and where the weary are at reſt;* where hope ſhall no more be cut off by diſappointment, and where the diſtreſſes of time are forgot in the joys of eternity.

FRANCIS.

LETTER XII.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

IS it thus that you hope to reform your Conſtantia? Do you think that you ſhall be able to effect this by letting her foibles paſs uncenſured, and conveying inſtruction to her in general terms? Alas! how little do you know of her petulant and capricious heart! It muſt be corrected with ſeverity, and quieted by overbearing reproof.

At preſent, indeed, it is ſufficiently depreſſed. Your obſervations on the folly and vanity of expecting happineſs in this world, came to me at a time when painful experience convinced me of their truth.

After Theodoſius was loſt to me, I contracted a friendſhip with an amiable and accompliſhed woman, to whom my melancholy and my misfortunes ſerved only to endear me the more. Her good ſenſe and her compaſſion ſoothed and ſupported me under all my ſufferings. She left me not to the attacks of ſolitary diſcontent, but aſſiduouſly diverted my mind by the efforts of elegant humour, poliſhed ſenſe, and ingenious obſervation. As if ſhe had preferred the company of ſorrow to every ſocial amuſement, even in that ſeaſon of life when the heart of health and peace is always gay, ſhe never forſook me during the laſt five unhappy years. She obſerved with unwearied vigilance, the hour when melancholy apprehenſion was increaſed to the acuteneſs of grief. She then followed me into whatever privacy I ſought; claſped me to her faithful boſom; and if, under the agonies of terror and anguiſh, tears refuſed their aſſiſtance, ſhe ſolicited, and obtained them by her infectious tenderneſs. When, at laſt, I determined to take the veil, and had obtained my father's conſent to forſake the world for ever, her affection followed me in that final reſolution. She waited only for an approaching opportunity to ſettle her worldly affairs, after which ſhe intended to have made one of our ſiſterhood, and to have paſſed the remaining part of her life with her Conſtantia.

Upon this event my heart repoſed. I foreſaw in this a ſcene of happineſs that could not be equalled upon earth, and I flattered myſelf that it would be as laſting as my own life. How many pleaſing hours have I paſſed in meditating on the future felicity of our friendſhip! How often, in the luxury of imagination, have I conſidered our united prayers aſcending more acceptably to the Throne of everlaſting Mercy! What joy did I promiſe myſelf, what importance in the eye of friendſhip, by communicating to my Sophia all the inſtructions I had received from my Theodoſius!

Oh, my friend! my father! theſe hopes are overthrown. Do I live? o tell you by what means? Sophia, my tender, my dear Sophia, is no more! The uneaſineſs I expreſſed in my laſt proceeded probably in ſome meaſure from my preſentiments of this cruel event. I am now very miſerable, and in great need of your paternal advice.

CONSTANCE.

LETTER XIII.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

AS true friendſhip is one of the greateſt bleſſings of human life, our ſorrow for the loſs of friends is more excuſeable than moſt of our complaints. But, though it may be more venial, it is not more reaſonable than any other mode of miſery that has it's origin in diſappointment. Did we think our friends immortal? Did we not know, while we held them to our hearts, that we were embracing the property of death, who would ſooner or later aſſert his claim?

Our reſignation to this, as well as to all other evils, ought to be confirmed by reflecting on the univerſal agency of Providence. The author of the book of Pſalms furniſhes us with excellent doctrine on this ſubject. We have ſcarce any where ſuch ſtriking pictures of human miſery as in that book. The royal writer has deſcribed, in the ſtrongeſt colours, the diſtreſſes and perplexities to which, as men, we are ſubject. He has deſcended to the private diſſatisfactions of the heart, and recounted many circumſtances of accidental calamity. Hence it is that his writings are of general uſe. Of the diſtreſſes that are incident to our being, though the proſpect be gloomy, it is neceſſary we ſhould obſerve it; as he who muſt make his way through pitfalls and precipices, would chuſe a plan of the road he was to travel, rather than march blindly forward without knowledge and without caution.

But theſe are not all the inſtructions which the Pſalmiſt affords us. We are ſeldom preſented with an afflicted proſpect of life without being directed to the means of comfort. We are told that, however great the cauſes of our affliction may be, they are ſubject to the wiſe directions of a Being benevolent to man: and that, though *heavineſs may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning*. The doctrine of an univerſal providence, which is the only ſource of conſolation under every ſpecies of miſery, is aſſerted though this whole book with the greateſt confidence of certainty.

'Who is like unto the Lord our 'God, who hath his dwelling ſo high, 'and yet humbleth himſelf to behold 'the things that are in heaven and 'earth?

'Thou ſhalt ſhew us wonderful 'things in thy righteouſneſs, O God of 'our ſalvation! Thou that art the 'hope of all the ends of the earth, and 'of them that remain in the broad ſea.

'They alſo that dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the world ſhall attend 'to thy tokens. Thou that makeſt 'the out-goings of the morning, and 'the evening to praiſe thee.'

In this belief of the univerſal agency of Providence the Pſalmiſt places the remedy of moral and natural evil.

'Should I find trouble and heavineſs, 'I will call upon the name of the 'Lord. O Lord, I beſeech thee, deliver my ſoul!

'The Lord preſerveth the innocent: 'I was in miſery, and he helped me.

'The proud, O Lord, have had me 'exceedingly in deriſion, but *I remembered thy everlaſting judgments, and 'received comfort*.'

The laſt ſentiment ought to be engraven upon the hearts of all the children of affliction.

Let us remember that God is the Supreme Governor of the univerſe; that under his direction is the whole ſyſtem of nature, by him animated, connected, ſupported. Let us conſider that the agency of man in this ſyſtem is only moral. The œconomy of life is committed to him ſo far as it may exerciſe his moral will; but the events of his actions are finally under the determination of the Almighty. Were not HE to direct the natural courſe of this world, even in thoſe circumſtances of it that are or may be affected by the moral power of man, order could no more be preſerved in the univerſe, than it could at firſt reſult from chance, or be formed by the direction of fallible beings.

This conſideration, that the Supreme Power has in his own hands the œconomy of the world, ought to engage our reſignation under every circumſtance of life: for, ſhould we quarrel with the diſpenſations of him who gave us being? Should we diſpute the regulations of that power, who has provided the means of this day's ſubſiſtence, and without whoſe favour and protection we could no longer exiſt? Is not he who made the world beſt able to govern

it?

it? Has not he who gave us this being a right to reſume it?

What mean, then, the pangs of diſappointment? What mean the languiſhing torments of ſorrow? The tears that flow for buried virtue, and the ſighs that mourn for parted friendſhip?

But to theſe queſtions you will ſay others may be oppoſed. You will aſk if theſe emotions ought to be excluded from the human heart, when they are evidently the effect of nature? You will enquire whether the God of nature would plant affections in his creatures, which to ſtifle would be a virtue?

To theſe queſtions I would reply, that thoſe affections for the objects of this world, which we have received with our being, may be indulged, but under certain limitations. Let us always conſider the end of ſuch affections. Certainly it could not be to create us miſery, when thoſe objects are no more; for that would be indirectly to repine at the diſpenſations of him who has removed them from us.

The voice of nature will be heard, and our tears will flow when our deareſt connections are broken. In this we only act like men: but when ſorrow is long indulged, it becomes criminal; for then we tamely give ourſelves up to thoſe paſſions which it is our duty to reſtrain, and act in petulant oppoſition to the decrees of Providence.

Human life muſt have many avenues to ſorrow and anxiety, while we are concerned for the welfare of thoſe objects which have engaged our affections, or the ſucceſs of thoſe ſchemes on which all our wiſdom has been employed. The duty of reſignation, therefore, like every other that is enjoined us, is calculated to promote our own happineſs. When we *remember* the *everlaſting judgments* of God, we may reaſonably *be filled with comfort in every event*.

'It is the Lord; let him do what 'ſeemeth unto him good. It is the 'Lord, the Lord God, merciful and 'gracious, ſlow to anger, abundant in 'goodneſs, and in truth.

'Why ſhould you ſay unto my ſoul, 'that ſhe ſhould flee as a bird unto the 'hill? Behold the Lord, the Lord of 'Hoſts is my refuge; the God of Ja-'cob is on my right-hand.'

Under ſuch confidence as this, what have we to fear, and for what ſhould we ſigh? That misfortunes ſeem to counteract our ſchemes of happineſs, and that the proſpects of hope are cut off by diſappointment; we might mourn indeed, were this the only ſcene of our exiſtence, and were our views terminated by our departure from it. That human knowledge is often inadequate to the purpoſes of life, and always imperfect, would be a melancholy conſideration, were it not attended with the proſpect of an exiſtence, where knowledge, as well as happineſs, ſhall flow from the fountain of Infinite Perfection.

This reflection might, one ſhould think, be ſufficient to ſet our hearts at eaſe with reſpect to temporary misfortunes; but ſtill more powerful will be the motives to reſignation, when we conſider that the Father of Heaven has not only promiſed us a ſafe retreat at laſt from our afflictions, but to ſupport us under them.

'Theſe things have I ſaid unto you, 'that in me ye might have peace: in the 'world ye ſhall have tribulation.

'Are not two ſparrows ſold for a 'farthing? and one of them falleth not 'to the ground without the permiſſion 'of my Father who is in Heaven. Are 'not ye of more value than many ſpar-'rows?'

That man in the ſyſtem of nature has a peculiar regard ſhewn him, it would be ſuperfluous to obſerve. None of us can be ſo blind to the bounties we enjoy, nor to the eminent prerogatives by which we are diſtinguiſhed. But I may infer, that as the favour of the Almighty is ſo evidently ſeen in man, his confidence in him, under every circumſtance of life, ought to be in proportion. If he is diſtinguiſhed by the light of reaſon, he ought not ſurely to make that light an inſtrument to cenſure the perfection from which it flows—yet diſcontent is a kind of cenſure on Providence.

Alas! my dear Conſtantia, how miſtaken is the man, how much an enemy to his own happineſs, who confides not in the meaſures, nor reſigns to the diſpenſations of his Creator: he robs himſelf at once of that ſovereign remedy of evil, reliance on a ſuperior power. He is involved in calamities without the alleviation of hope, and ſubject to misfortunes without redreſs.

But happy, above all names of happineſs, is he who with grateful humility ſubmits to the determinations of God. The viciſſitudes of fortune cannot diſ-

treſs him. He is ſecure in the care of Almighty Goodneſs. Nature may ſhrink back from the ſtroke of affliction, but the conflict that is ſupported by hope can neither be long nor painful.

'Why art thou ſo full of heavineſs, 'O my ſoul, and why art thou ſo diſ-'quieted within me? Truſt in God.'

The great object of his hope, the perfect happineſs of a future exiſtence, he knows, cannot be very diſtant—that he has but to travel a few days longer till he reach the manſions of everlaſting reſt, where the miſeries and deluſions of mortality ſhall vaniſh, and *ſorrow and mourning ſhall flee away*. Adieu, my Conſtantia! Think of theſe things, and be happy.

FRANCIS.

LETTER XIV.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

WITHOUT waiting any return to my laſt, I once more ſit down to write to you. I would in ſome meaſure imitate that dear and valuable friend you have loſt, whoſe aſſiduous tenderneſs, you ſay, would never leave you to the attacks of ſolitary ſorrow. This was wiſely done when your grief had continued unreaſonably long; but I am always of opinion, that under the firſt ſtages of ſorrow the mind ſhould be left to itſelf; and would our common rules permit me to viſit you, I ſhould decline it till the violence of your grief ſubſided.

The objection, however, does not lie with the ſame force againſt writing to you. We can better bear the ſentiments of our friends, when they are not perſonally witneſſes to our weakneſs.

My deſign at preſent is not to inſtruct but to amuſe you. I therefore ſend you poetry inſtead of philoſophy; or rather, indeed, philoſophy harmonized; for the ſentimental part of the following compoſition is truly noble.

PSALM CVII.

YET once more wake the ſtrain of grateful praiſe,
To that Eternal Power whoſe mercy ſhines
O'er all his works, immortal! Let them wake
The grateful ſtrain once more, thoſe happier ſons,
Whom his hand reſcued from the hoſtile chain
Of old captivity! From climes remote,
From the firſt openings of the orient day,
From Heſper's ſilver flood-gates, from the ſtar
That ſhoots it's pale rays o'er the ſhivering north,
From Egypt's tyrant ſhores, his parent voice
Their ſcattered trains aſſembled. Long they ſtray'd
Thro' wild woods unfrequented; long—nor found
City, or ſafe abode; till nature ſunk
With meagre want oppreſt, and the faint pulſe
Of life beat weakly. Then, with humble prayer
To Heaven they turn'd repentant; nor unheard.
Eternal Mercy led the wanderers forth
To habitable towns, and ſafe abodes.

O for the ſpirit of exalted praiſe,
To blazon high thoſe acts of power divine,
Thoſe boundleſs mercies that embrace mankind!

They, thrice unhappy! o'er whoſe joyleſs heads
Grim darkneſs hovers, they who lonely dwell
In Death's unchearful ſhade, afflicted, bound
In cold impriſoning chains, the ſad reward
Of impious, daring, and rebellious deeds,
When heavenly Juſtice, with her radiant arm
Smites their proud hearts; e'en they, by humble prayer,
Unfold ſweet Mercy's eaſy-ſliding gates;
Their iron bondage burſts, and forth they ruſh
From Death's dim ſhadow to the golden day.

O for the ſpirit of exalted praiſe,
To blazon high thoſe acts of power divine,
Thoſe boundleſs mercies that embrace mankind!

Folly's vain votaries, from diſorder wild,
And mad intemperance, reaping painful fruits,
Diſeaſe and languor, to the dreary door
Of Death move trembling.—Then with humble prayer
To Heaven they turn repentant, nor unheard.
Health's roſy light relumes the languid cheek,
And Ruin quits his meditated prey.

O for the ſpirit of exalted praiſe,
To blazon high thoſe acts of power divine,
Thoſe boundleſs mercies that embrace mankind!

Let man for ever wake the grateful ſtrain,
The ſacrifice of reaſon; ever ſing
His Maker's works, and triumph in the ſong.

The bold adventurers, on the ſtormy breaſt
Of ocean, tenants of the wat'ry world,

Mark

Mark in the mighty waſte of ſeas and ſkies,
Magnificence Divine. At his command
The ſwift wind ſweeps the billows; up they riſe
Infuriate to the vault of heaven, then down
Precipitately ſteep, diſparting, ope
The vaſt abyſs voracious. Ah! where then,
Weak mariners, your hopes? Then the heart faints.
From ſide to ſide they run, they reel, they fall,
Inebriate with confuſion. Nought remains
But trembling prayer, the laſt appeal to Heaven.
Nor vain the laſt appeal. Already, ſee!
The rapid ſtorm ſubſides, and the wave ſleeps.
Alert within the merry ſailor's heart
Springs hope; and ſoon he hails the welcome port.

O for the ſpirit of exalted praiſe,
To blazon high thoſe acts of power divine,
Thoſe boundleſs mercies that embrace mankind!

From the full choir of undiſtinguiſh'd crowds,
From Wiſdom's choſen ſynod, crown'd with years,
To him for ever flow collective praiſe!

Where in wild ſweetneſs roſe the ſallying ſpring,
Where ſpreads the copious river, where diſplayed
The vale it's verdant honours, barren lies
A dry waſte, mark of Heaven's avenging hand;
When ſacred Juſtice ſpoke the doom of guilt.

But lo! where once the dry waſte barren lay,
There in wild ſweetneſs flows the ſallying ſpring,
There ſpreads the copious river, there diſplays
The vale it's verdant honours; hamlets fair,
Rich harveſts, bluſhing vineyards, golden fruits,
And flocks abundant, the long-famiſh'd ſwain
Beholds delighted. Heaven's peculiar care
Are all Affliction's children: when the yoke
Of ſtern Oppreſſion ſinks the weary heart,
Periſh the ſtern oppreſſors: low in duſt,
Low lies each princely head; while guarded ſafe,
As flocks repoſing in their evening fold,
The peaſant ſleeps in peace. O ſight of joy
To faithful Piety! of conſcious pain,
And keen conviction, to the heart of guilt!

This, this is Wiſdom's leſſon: to explore
The active ſcheme of Providence; to learn
His love divine; and, learning, to confide.

There is no employment ſo delightful to a devout mind as this attention to the viſible adminiſtration of Providence. To contemplate the Creator of the univerſe in the magnificence of his works, enlarges and elevates the ſoul, lifts it above the impertinence of vulgar cares, and gives it a kind of heavenly pre-exiſtence. To conſider the benevolent purpoſes for which he called forth this variety and multitude of being, that comes under our cognizance, muſt be a perpetual ſource of comfort. A rational creature, that is conſcious of deriving it's exiſtence from a Being of infinite goodneſs and power, cannot properly entertain any proſpect but of happineſs. By the imperfection of it's nature it may fall into temporary evils, but theſe cannot juſtly be the ſubject of complaint, when we reflect that this very imperfection was neceſſary to a probatory life, and that, without it, there could neither have been virtue, nor the rewards of virtue. Every degree of excellence depends upon compariſon. Were there no deformity in the world, we ſhould have no diſtinct ideas of beauty: were there no poſſibility of vice, there would be no ſuch thing as virtue; and were the life of man exempt from miſery, happineſs would be a term of which he could not know the meaning.

Adieu! Be wiſe and happy.

FRANCIS.

LETTER XV.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

IF I could pronounce my heart to be perfectly at eaſe, you would have the only reward you deſire for your paternal care. But ſhall I, on the contrary, avow my ingratitude? Shall I own that this obſtinate, this petulant heart, is not yet at reſt? Could it oppoſe itſelf to the united efforts of reaſon and religion? Would it neither be ſoothed by harmony, nor ſilenced by philoſophy? Vain, incorrigible heart!

Indeed, my venerable friend, I muſt not diſſemble with you: I have not yet recovered my former peace. And yet, why? I have the ſame confidence in the adminiſtration of Providence. I believe as much in his goodneſs, as much in his wiſdom. I attend, with the ſame readineſs, on the duties of religion, and offer up my prayers with the ſame aſſiance. I agree to every concluſion you have

have drawn either from moral or religious arguments. I acknowledge the propriety, the duty of reſignation, under every circumſtance of affliction, and yet I am afflicted. I ſee the abſurdity of grief, yet I am grieved. What can I do more? I ſubmit entirely to the diſpenſations of Providence. My will ſubmits. I do not wiſh to call my departed friend to life: but this ſubmiſſion does not clear my heart of ſorrow. Surely it has ſome connections which are not obedient to the will, and from which it derives involuntary pleaſure or pain. Is not this true? We experience it in all inſtances of affection: we are ſenſible of attachments we cannot account for; and as thoſe attachments are facilitated or interrupted, we are happy or miſerable independently of reaſon or the will. If theſe obſervations are founded upon truth and nature, I hope I ſhall ſtand excuſed both before you, and at a higher tribunal, for thoſe tears that have fallen over the grave of my Sophia.

Think not that I implicitly give myſelf up to the dominion of my Sorrow. I have been too well acquainted with it, not to know by what means it's influence is increaſed or abated. I do not deepen the gloom of melancholy by ſolitary reflection; I ſeek the ſociety of the ſiſterhood, and endeavour to enter into their amuſements, as well as to join their devotions. In thoſe hours when I muſt neceſſarily be alone, if the uneaſineſs of my heart hinders the approach of ſleep, I have recourſe to my books; till at laſt the wearineſs of attention prevails over the force of ſorrow, and procures me that reſt which the latter would have prevented.

In the courſe of this reading, I have met with many things on which I wanted to conſult you, but moſt of them have eſcaped me. Some of theſe, however, I remember. In a book of divinity, which, I ſuppoſe, muſt have been written by one of the hereſy of Calvin, the author aſſerts, that the 'Almighty 'has appointed a day of grace to every 'man, beyond which there can be no 'remiſſion of ſin*.' I muſt own I was ſtartled by this aſſertion, as it ſeemed to me to be very conſequential. The following, I think, were ſome of the texts on which he founded this belief.

'Seek ye the Lord, while he may 'be found; call ye upon him, while 'he is near.

'Oh, that thou hadſt known, even 'thou, in this thy day, the things that 'belong unto thy peace! But now they 'are hid from thine eyes.

'Again, he limiteth a day, ſaying, 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice, 'harden not your hearts.'

In another part of his book, he maintains that it is impoſſible for thoſe who fall into ſin, after having once been converted, to repent, or to be ſaved †. This doctrine he ſupports by the following paſſage in the Epiſtle to the Hebrews.

'It is impoſſible for thoſe who were 'once enlightened, and have taſted of 'the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have 'taſted the good word of God, and the 'powers of the world to come; if they 'ſhall fall away, to renew them again 'unto repentance: ſeeing they crucify 'to themſelves the ſon of God afreſh, 'and put him to open ſhame.'

To this paſſage he adds another, ſelected from the ſame book.

'If we ſin wilfully after we have re'ceived the knowledge of the truth, 'there remaineth no more ſacrifice for 'ſins but a certain fearful looking for 'of judgment, and fiery indignation, 'which ſhall devour the adverſaries. 'He that deſpiſed Moſes's law, died 'without mercy, under two or three 'witneſſes. Of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be 'thought worthy, who hath trodden 'under foot the Son of God, and hath 'counted the blood of the covenant, 'wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done deſpite to 'the Spirit of Grace?'

I muſt own theſe texts appeared to me to make very ſtrongly for his argument; and yet if theſe doctrines were generally received, I think they would open more avenues to deſpair; for many chriſtians, I fear, muſt have ſinned wilfully after repentance and converſion. But, poſſibly, I do not behold theſe Scriptures in a right point of view. Let me hope for your kind inſtructions; and pray for your

CONSTANTIA.

* Many of our modern fanaticks, methodiſts, &c. hold this doctrine.

† This is another doctrine of fanaticiſm.

LETTER

LETTER XVI.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

YOU do well to amuſe yourſelf by books and company; that amuſement will divert your melancholy more effectually than any precepts of philoſophy.

But what ſhall I ſay to your controverſial ſtudies? Shall I praiſe you for wearying your eyes over the pages of Calviniſtick dreamers; for honouring with your attention the groundleſs doctrines of narrow-ſighted fanaticks; who, either from want of knowledge or of candour, or more probably from want of both, have ſeized a limb of a text, and without attending either to the writer's deſign, or to the analogy of his reaſoning, have founded upon the mere letter, doctrines that diſhonour their God?

Such, and ſo founded, are thoſe you have mentioned.

That God hath appointed a certain period in the life of man, beyond which he will not extend his grace to him, is a doctrine which is ſo far from having any foundation either in reaſon or revelation, that it is repugnant to the firſt, and totally unſupported by the latter.

The texts which your author has produced in ſupport of his opinion, have no manner of connection with it.

'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be 'found; call ye upon him, while he 'is near.'

The whole chapter from which this paſſage is taken, refers to the time of the Meſſiah's firſt appearance. The prophet breaks out into raptures upon the view of that glorious æra; and apoſtrophizes to the people that ſhould then be born, exhorting them not to loſe the happy opportunity of making an intereſt with the Redeemer while he was perſonally preſent with them.

'O that thou hadſt known, even 'thou, in this thy day, the things that 'belong unto thy peace! but now they 'are hid from thine eyes.'

This is Chriſt's apoſtrophe to Jeruſalem, when he foretold it's approaching deſtruction. But what has this to do with the univerſal diſpenſation of Grace? The words are particularly applicable to the occaſion on which they were ſpoken, and to the object whereunto they were addreſſed. 'Unhappy 'city! I wiſh thou kneweſt, *in this thy* '*day* while thou art yet undeſtroyed, 'or while I am preſent with thee, *the* '*things that belong unto thy peace*, thy 'everlaſting peace, the mercies of re-'demption: *but now they are hid from* '*thine eyes*; at this time thou perceiv-'eſt them not.'

Or, poſſibly, *thy peace* may ſignify, thy *temporal* peace, and preſervation from thine enemies; which interpretation the following verſe ſeems to favour. 'But now they are hid from thine eyes. 'BECAUSE the days will come upon 'thee, when thine enemies,' &c. I incline to this ſenſe; but whether this or the other be the true one, is quite immaterial to the œconomy of grace.

Let us now conſider the laſt Scripture which your author has adduced in favour of his doctrine.

'Again, he limiteth a day, ſaying, 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice.'

The author of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, in the chapter from whence this paſſage is taken, endeavours to prove the certainty of that final reſt which ſtill remained to the people of God. Thus he forms his argument; 'That 'there is a reſt for the people of God 'into which they have not yet entered, 'appears from that prophetick pſalm of 'David, which alludes to the time of 'Chriſt's appearance upon earth. The 'prophet, referring to that time, ſaith, 'To-day, if ye will hear his voice. You 'ſee he is determined as to the point of 'time; he limiteth or ſetteth apart a 'day: wherefore, from this paſſage it 'is apparent, that for you, Hebrews, 'for you the deſcendants of thoſe who 'provoked God in the wilderneſs, and 'were not permitted to enter into his 'reſt, a final reſt ſtill remains, to which 'you are invited.'

Thus it is, my Conſtantia, that the diſciples of ignorance, folly and fanaticiſm, by disjoining and miſconſtruing the Scriptures, contrive their abſurd doctrines; for inſtance, the tenet abovementioned. Is it conſiſtent with the juſtice or the goodneſs of God, who has appointed to a man a life of probation, to limit the advantages, which, in his mercy, he has vouchſafed to him, to a ſhorter term than his life? While he leaves him ſtill to contend with the enemies of his ſalvation, will he deprive him of his principal ſupport, the

aid

Pages Missing

aid of his grace? his grace, which he has promiſed to thoſe that aſk it, without exception, and without limitation?

I have done with the firſt tenet of your author; let us now ſee whether the ſecond be better founded.

It is impoſſible, he maintains, for thoſe who fall into ſin, after having once been converted, to repent or to be ſaved. This opinion he ſupports by two paſſages from the Epiſtle to the Hebrews. Without making any remarks on the infallibility of that Epiſtle as a rule of faith, without taking notice of the difficulty and the late day of it's admiſſion among the canonical books, I ſhall ſhew you that your author has made the paſſages he has ſelected from that book prove too much. What the writer of the Epiſtle means by *falling away*, in the firſt paſſage, and by *ſinning wilfully* in the laſt, is the denial of the faith they had profeſſed, and openly apoſtatizing from it. This is clear from the concluſion of both the paſſages. Thoſe who *fall away* are ſaid *to crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and to put him to open ſhame.* And he who *ſinneth wilfully* is repreſented *to have trodden under foot the Son of God, to have counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing, and to have done deſpite to the Spirit of Grace.*

From hence it appears, that for a downright apoſtate there is no hope of repentance or remiſſion of ſins. But your author has not confined this terrible denunciation to open apoſtacy. According to him, none who have fallen into ſin after converſion are capable of being renewed by repentance, or ſaved by the redemption of Chriſt. This doctrine is equally unſcriptural, and unreaſonable.

Should man, circumſtanced as he is, be expoſed by frailty to final puniſhment, or reduced by accidentally falling into vice, to irretrieveable ruin, he might either turn from the race that is ſet before him, in hopeleſs deſpondence, or vainly contend with danger and diſgrace. The pilgrimage of human life is infinitely troubleſome and perplexed. Dangers there are, and difficulties, which all muſt encounter, which can neither be eluded by vigilance, nor annihilated by contempt.

'A juſt man,' ſays the author of the Book of Proverbs, 'falleth ſeven times, 'and riſeth again.' In this place a certain is put for an uncertain number; ſeven times being among the Jews an indefinite expreſſion, uſed to ſignify any moderate number.

Our Saviour himſelf being aſked how oft a brother ſhould offend and be entitled to forgiveneſs, and whether or not till ſeven times, anſwered, 'Not until 'ſeven times, but till ſeventy times ſe-'ven.' From this paſſage we have the utmoſt reaſon to hope, that whenever man ſhall effectually repent, the Divine Goodneſs will be ready to forgive him. For if we are commanded to receive into favour an offending brother, however frequently he may have treſpaſſed againſt us, ſhall not our heavenly Father in like manner be ready to receive ſuch as turn unto him? Shall God recommend ſuch a conduct to man as he ſhould not admit in himſelf? Are we not told, that the repentance of a ſinner is unexceptionably ſo acceptable to the Almighty, that the angels in heaven rejoice, and congratulate their ſupreme and affectionate Creator on an event ſo agreeable to his gracious mind?

The prodigal in the Goſpel returns not to his father till he had finiſhed his courſe of riot, which was interrupted by nothing but his power to purſue it. He returns not till compelled by neceſſity, and therefore his repentance was not a voluntary virtue. But, behold, his father meets him while yet a great way off, and precludes his apologies by the moſt endearing reception. We have not, indeed, any account of a relapſe in the accepted prodigal; but we are told that before the execution of his repentance, he ſaid unto himſelf, 'How 'many hired ſervants of my father have 'bread enough, and to ſpare, while I 'periſh with hunger!' Some ſuch reflections he muſt frequently have made, when reduced to diſtreſs, and again probably muſt have quitted them from various motives.

We want not, however, this inſtance, to prove that a ſinner may be reſtored to favour after falling away from his former reſolutions and profeſſions of obedience. The example of Peter is a ſufficient proof in this caſe. To this I ſhall add another, which, though not of ſcriptural authority, is reſpectable, and very much to the preſent purpoſe.

Euſebius tells us, that Saint John, during

the one emaciated with ſorrow and watching, and the faculties of the other almoſt ſunk in ſtupefaction.

Great diſtreſſes are the ſpectres of the mind; and, as it is fabled of the ghoſts of ſelf-murdered bodies, they hover over the ſcene where their object is intombed. Buſineſs and amuſement, ſociety and ſolitude, were alike impreſſed with the image of Theodoſius: the painful idea purſued me through every avocation, nor could I find a retreat from it in the boſom of friendſhip. The ſympathizing heart of my Sophia added new ſoftneſs to my own, and the tenderneſs of her friendſhip made me feel more ſenſibly the loſs of Theodoſius.

At laſt that dear lamented friend, with ſome few more that pitied and regarded me, applied to my father for his permiſſion that I might retire into a convent. Their generoſity procured me what the voice of nature and the tears of duty had ſolicited in vain; and, by the irreſiſtible offer of diſcharging the fees of my admiſſion, they prevailed on the father of Conſtantia, that ſhe might be permitted to take the veil.

Since I entered upon the conventual life, my conduct has been too well known to you, if not to need an apology, at leaſt to be enlarged upon here. But after thoſe aſpirations of gratitude that riſe to Heaven, after thoſe truly grateful ſentiments which I muſt ever entertain for thoſe beneficent friends who procured my eſtabliſhment in this place, what words ſhall I find expreſſive of that gratitude which is due to Father Francis?—that tender, that affectionate father, who has nurſed my mind with thoſe paternal aſſiduities, which were ſomewhat above the moſt perfect nature of man, which could only flow from a heart where human ſenſibility was exalted and refined by the immortal graces, and where God himſelf elevated and expanded that philanthropy which he loves.

To the ever-venerable Father Francis I owe the greateſt moral bleſſings that are attainable in this world—peace of conſcience, and rectitude of reaſon. For the recovery of the firſt, indeed, little more was neceſſary than the certainty that Theodoſius was alive and happy; but the conſolations of the father added to the preſence of the friend, replaced that quiet in my heart to which it had been ſo long a ſtranger. Thoſe conſolations, however, were not more ſoothing than the leſſons that attended them were inſtructive. While from thoſe I derived content and comfort, from theſe I received the lights of truth and reaſon, and was taught to look up with an intelligent adoration to that Being whoſe eſſence is Goodneſs and Wiſdom. From the conſideration of theſe diſtinguiſhing attributes, whenever he ſhall reſume that life which he gave me, I ſhall reſign it into his hands without ſorrow, and without fear.

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With difficulty I had written thus far, when the importunity of my diſorder obliged me to lay down the pen. I have now reſumed it, and will bear it as long as I am able; for while I hold but even an ideal converſation with you, the ſenſe of pain is ſuſpended. Other than bodily pain I have none. The preſumption with which my apology concluded, I find, was not vain. I am perfectly indifferent to the approach of death, and agreeably to the kind wiſh with which you once* concluded a letter, I truſt that 'my ſpirit ſhall quit, without a ſigh, the frame that confines it.'

To you, my deareſt friend, my moſt venerable father, loved by every dear, and reſpected by every ſacred name, to you, under the gracious appointments of Providence, I owe this happy ſerenity. By giving me proper ideas of the Author of Nature, and the obligations of his creatures, you have taught me to look on death as one of his beſt gifts, and on all beyond it without any apprehenſion.

Behold here the reward of your pious labours! Behold with pleaſure the reſignation of a mind that you ſtrengthened, of a heart that you armed againſt yourſelf.

'My heart was grieved, and it went
'even through my reins.

'So fooliſh was I and ignorant, even
'as it were *an irrational creature* be-
'fore thee.

'Nevertheleſs I am always by thee,
'for thou haſt holden me by my right-
'hand.

* This laſt letter of Conſtantia, and the anſwer of Theodoſius, ſeem to have been written ſome years after the preceding letters.

'Thou ſhalt guide me with thy coun-
'ſel, and after that receive me *in* glo-
'ry.

'Whom *ſhall* I have in Heaven but
'thee, *for* there is none upon earth that
'I deſire in compariſon of thee?

'My fleſh, and my heart faileth, but
'God is the ſtrength of my heart, and
'my portion for ever!'

And now, deareſt, and moſt revered of men, farewel! Whether we ſhall meet again in any future allotment of being, is amongſt the ſacred counſel of Providence. I truſt we ſhall. Till then indulge one tender farewel from your Conſtantia! accept one pious, one grateful adieu, from

CONSTANCE.

LETTER XVIII.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

LET not my Conſtantia be alarmed when ſhe ſees that this letter is written by another hand. Let not that fortitude with which ſhe has ſo greatly ſupported her own ſufferings, be diſſolved in weakneſs for her friend; nor that noble tranquillity, with which ſhe beholds the approach of death, be diſturbed, when ſhe is told that his hand is on Theodoſius. I doubt not that the Eternal Providence, who, in his wiſdom, interwove the intereſts and the paſſions of our lives, has, in his goodneſs, determined that they ſhall cloſe together. If this be one of his gracious diſpenſations, I receive it not only with ſubmiſſion, but with gratitude. What more could I deſire of the Divine Beneficence, than that, delivered from this priſon of earth, I might accompany the ſpirit of my Conſtantia to the regions of everlaſting happineſs, to ſome more perfect appointment in the ſcale of being, where the immortal faculties ſhall be refined from human frailty, and where the powers of the ſoul ſhall be expanded by a nearer approach to that Perfection from which they are derived. Animated with hopes, and ſupported by ſentiments like theſe, let us wait without fear the approach of death, and receive him gladly, becauſe he *cometh as a friend*. Indulge, my Conſtantia, the pleaſing hope that our ſouls will know each other in their future allotment. The pure attachments of love and friendſhip, founded upon and ſupported by eſteem, may laſt beyond the grave, becauſe they have their exiſtence in the ſoul. And will not that Being, whoſe eſſence is love, ſupport and cheriſh thoſe connections which are agreeable to his commands, and thoſe ſentiments which are congenial with his own Divine Nature? Will he, who commanded us to *love one another*, extinguiſh in the grave thoſe virtuous affections, which, when living, it was our duty to cultivate? It is not improbable that our happineſs in Heaven may, in ſome meaſure, conſiſt in the harmonious intercourſe of a perfect ſociety; for I have no idea of a ſolitary happineſs, even in the regions of perfection. Moreover, from what little accounts we find of the angelick ſtate in the ſacred writings, we ſee that the ideas of aſſociation and intercourſe are always annexed to them. If then it is not to be doubted that in our future ſtate we ſhall aſſociate with ſome order of beings, can any thing be more probable than that we ſhould mix with thoſe kindred and congenial ſpirits, who, like ourſelves, have had their appointments on earth, whether in different times and places, or the ſame? If in the ſame, which is ſtill probable, and if the identity of our ſpiritual natures cannot be deſtroyed, why ſhould not the characteriſticks of the ſoul be known in heaven as well as upon earth? I am willing to believe, at leaſt, that the Eternal Goodneſs will permit this future knowledge; and though we know too little of the ſtate of ſpirits to conceive the mode of their future communication, yet this we know, that it is in the power of God to permit what we wiſh for, and I truſt that, in his kindneſs, he will permit it.

Then, my Conſtantia! for that ſtate of exalted friendſhip, where the fears and frailties of mortality ſhall be known no more! for that happy intercourſe of ſpiritual pleaſures, which ſhall be no longer ſubject to the influences of chance or time; which ſhall neither be oppreſſed by langour, nor diſturbed by anxiety! Compared with that ineffable complacency, that ſublime delight, which even the hope alone of theſe things inſpires, what are the ſufferings, however peculiar, that we have hitherto endured? Were there, indeed, no future ſtate of being to commence after this, who would not wiſh to be thus agree-

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ably deceived? Who would not wiſh to triumph over thoſe gloomy apprehenſions, which the thought of annihilation muſt neceſſarily create, in a being to whom nature has given the love of exiſtence?

But if the foretaſte of future happineſs be ſo great; if when only contemplated through the imperfect medium of human imagination, it is capable of inſpiring ſuch exalted delight, how inconceivably great muſt the real and perfect enjoyment be! Let us here, my Conſtantia, indulge the utmoſt ſtretch of hope; whatever an Almighty and all-beneficent Being can give, and whatever our glorified faculties can receive, let us ſuppoſe our own. He that giveth not of his Spirit by meaſure, he that openeth his hand, and ſhutteth it not again, ſhall not he freely give us all things?

When I conſider the wiſdom and benevolence of that Almighty Being, through whoſe kindneſs I have hitherto been ſupported in life, like my Conſtantia, I can walk without trembling through the dark valley of the ſhadow of death. And whence, but from the ſame conſideration, could your tender and apprehenſive heart derive that more than manly firmneſs which is viſible in your letter? That information which you ſo kindly aſcribe to my inſtructions, you have drawn from your own experience of the wiſdom and the goodneſs of Providence; to whom your gratitude is due for the rectitude of reaſon, as well as for every other bleſſing you enjoy.

I will now no longer withold your mind from the meditation of that glorious Being, whoſe more viſible favours we ſhall ſhortly obtain. Indeed, my faculties are already too much confuſed for regular thinking; and death, I find, makes haſty paces towards me. Accept my laſt bleſſing.

'Bleſs, O God! O Father of Na-
'ture, bleſs my Conſtantia! ſupport
'her gentle ſpirit under the conflict of
'death! and lead her by the light of
'thy countenance to thy everlaſting
'reſt!'

And now—Oh! now—farewel, my Conſtantia!—my Conſtance! my ſiſter! my friend! By every dear, and every holy name—farewel! I have converſed with you till the laſt moment.—But, —but we ſhall meet again. Adieu!

FINIS.